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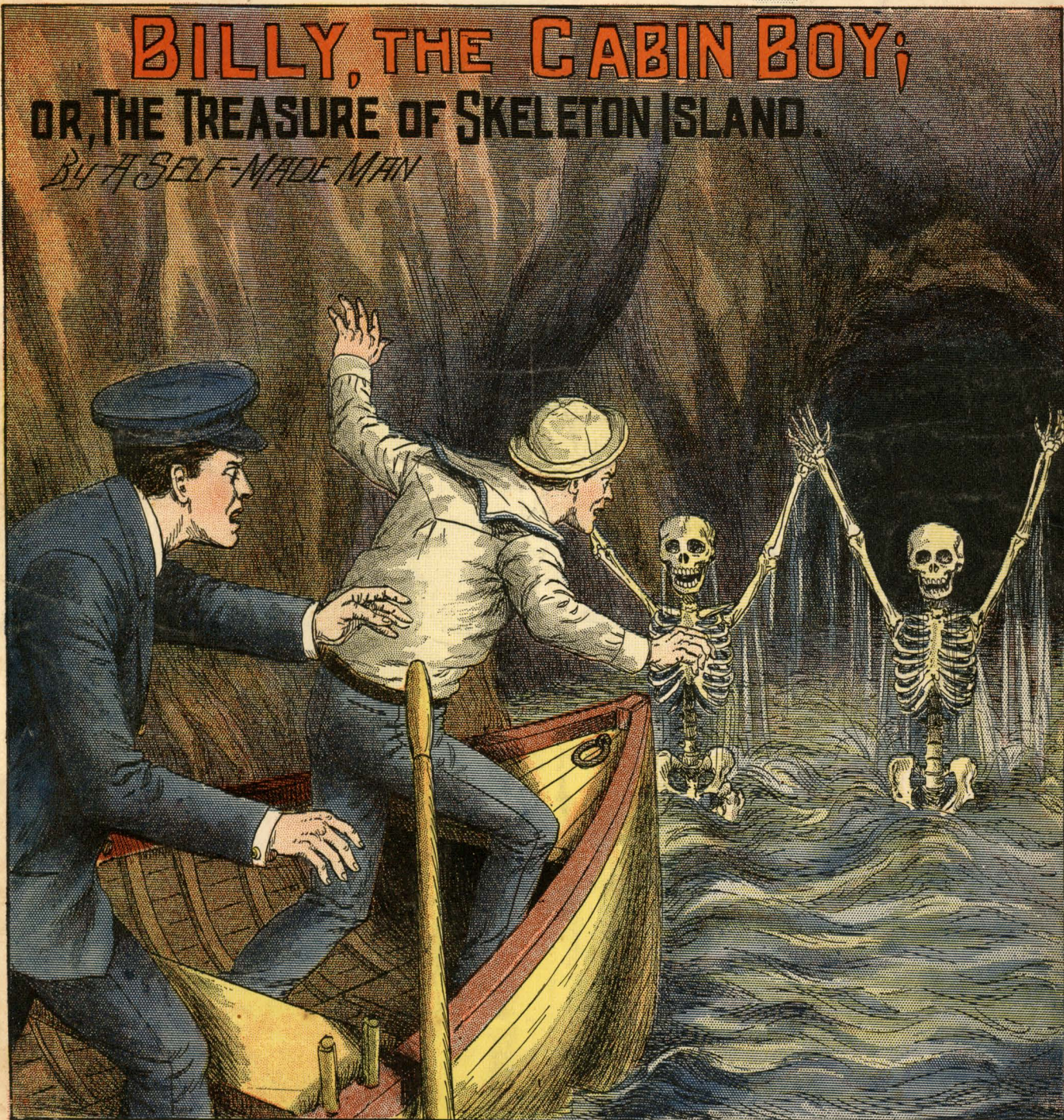
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FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

BILLY, THE CABIN BOY; OR, THE TREASURE OF SKELETON ISLAND.

By A SELF-MADE MAN



Just then the boat ran against an invisible obstruction. Instantly two ghastly objects shot out of the water directly ahead. "Great Scott!" gasped Billy, in dismay, "what are we up against?" "A pair of skeletons!" gurgled Dick, dropping his oars.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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BILLY THE CABIN BOY

OR,

THE TREASURE OF SKELETON ISLAND

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

A DERELICT OF THE SEA.

"Deck ahoy!" sang out Dick Raymond, a bright-looking sailor lad, perched astride of the cross-trees on the foremast of the American brig Malta, bound from San Francisco to Melbourne, Australia, shortly after sunrise.

"Hello, lookout!" answered Mr. Jordan, the second mate, who was in charge of the deck at the time.

"A boat two points on our weather bow, sir," replied Dick.

The mate sprang into the rigging and leveled his glass in the direction indicated.

Sweeping the rolling surface of the broad South Pacific he presently made out a dark speck upon the summit of a wave some distance off.

The next moment it had disappeared, but only to reappear again in the same position a few moments later.

After watching it intently for awhile he dropped to the deck and ordered the steersman to bring the brig's head a point closer to the wind.

Fifteen minutes later the object, which was undoubtedly a small boat, could be made out from the poop deck.

The morning watch was just finishing washing down the main deck, and the sunshine was beginning to flash from various bits of brasswork on the bulwarks and elsewhere.

There was scarcely a cloud in the sky, and the warmth of that semi-tropical latitude was toned down by the smacking breeze under which the weather-beaten brig was ploughing her way, with every stitch of canvas set, southward.

As the sailors knocked off work they went and hung over

the weather bulwark and looked over the water at the dark object which had first attracted the attention of the young lookout, and was drawing nearer every moment.

He had reported it as a boat, and the seamen began speculating as to whether it was an empty one that had broken loose from some vessel, or whether it contained survivors of a marine disaster.

Every now and then the mate scanned the approaching boat through his glass, which brought it out into clear relief now, but he could not see any sign of life in it.

The blade of an oar peeped above the bow, and something like a rag fluttered in the wind amidships.

"Lookout, ahoy!" shouted the mate.

"Ahoy, sir!" replied Dick Raymond.

"Can you see anything in the boat?"

There was no answer for perhaps half a minute, then Dick answered:

"I think there's a man in it, sir."

The mate ran up the rigging nearly to the futtock shrouds and brought his glass to bear on the boat from that point.

When he descended he called to a good-looking lad who had just come out of the cabin door.

"Billy, go to the cap'n's stateroom and report a boat with a man in it about half a mile away on our weather bow."

"All right, sir," replied Billy Black, the cabin boy, turning around and re-entering the cabin.

In about a minute or two Captain Scott appeared up the companion stairs, clad in his shirt and trousers.

The mate pointed out the boat to him and he took a look at it through the glass.

"You say there's a man in it?" said the captain, returning the telescope.

"So Raymond reported from the cross-trees, and I also made out a man's figure through the glass from the shrouds."

"Send a boat, then, to tow the derelict alongside."

The mate ordered one of the boats on the job.

Two sailors and a steersman went in her, and were soon alongside the lone boat.

They looked into her and were presently seen towing the little craft to the brig, which had been hove to.

As they drew near the outline of a man was easily to be seen stretched out in the bottom of the derelict, with one fist, grasping a fluttering bandanna handkerchief, resting on one of the seats.

The falls were made fast to the strange boat and she was hauled up to the level of the bulwark.

The dead or unconscious man was lifted out on deck, the boat pulled in and deposited close to the bulwark and the hoists sent down for the brig's own boat.

The captain came forward and looked at the derelict's passenger.

He was not a pleasant-looking object to gaze upon.

His was a villainous countenance, heightened by a scar across one cheek and a two-weeks' growth of bristly beard.

His reddish hair was cropped short upon a bullet head, and he was dressed only in a soiled shirt, open at the chest, and a pair of dirty trousers.

His skin was deeply tanned by the sun, and the outline of a skull and crossbones was tattooed on his breast.

His slightly parted lips revealed an ugly-looking tusk of a tooth, that gave his countenance a satanic kind of grin.

Whether he was dead or alive could not be determined without a close examination, and this office the captain seemed reluctant to undertake.

He turned to one of the sailors.

"See if the fellow's heart beats," he said.

The sailor examined the man.

"Yes. It beats, but not very strong."

"Billy," said the captain to the cabin boy, who stood close by, an interested spectator of the scene, "tell the steward to send me a glass of brandy."

"Yes, sir," replied Billy, who turned and started for the pantry which opened off the passage leading from the door of the poop to the cabin aft.

In a few minutes he was back with the spirits.

Captain Scott knelt on the deck, and pushing open the unconscious man's mouth poured some of the brandy down his throat.

It produced an instantaneous effect.

He choked, coughed, squirmed about a moment, and then opened his eyes.

He stared into the captain's face, and around at the circle of sailors, as if he did not quite comprehend where he was.

Then he struggled up on one elbow, but fell back through sheer weakness.

The skipper gave him another portion of the brandy.

This brightened him up more, and he muttered some indistinct words between his teeth.

Captain Scott did not think he was in a condition to be questioned at present, so he ordered him to be removed to a spare bunk in the forecabin and looked after.

The watch below had come on deck one by one by this time, as it was breakfast hour, and they regarded the waif of the sea with considerable curiosity, but no great liking.

He was certainly not a person to inspire any degree of confidence.

The sailors talked about him while eating their breakfast, and wondered what wreck he seemed to be the survivor of.

The forenoon watch went on duty at eight o'clock, and Dick Raymond was relieved from his lonely perch aloft.

The first mate took charge of the deck and Mr. Jordan went to his breakfast in the cabin, where he was waited on by Billy Black.

Billy then had his own breakfast in the pantry with the steward, after which he carried a big pan to the galley for hot water in which to wash the dirty dishes, etc.

While waiting for the Chinese cook to fill the pan for him he entered into conversation with his particular friend, Dick, who was serving before the mast as ordinary seaman.

"Did you see the chap we picked up in the boat, Dick?" he asked.

"I saw the outlines of him in the distance before he was rescued, and I afterward saw him lying on the deck, surrounded by the cap'n and watch, yourself included," replied Dick. "Shipwrecked sailor, isn't he?"

"Give it up. Doesn't look to me like a sailor, though he has a tattoo mark on his chest. He's a hard-looking rooster, if I ever saw one," said Billy.

"Where is he now, in the fok's'?"

"Yes."

"How came he to be in the boat?"

"Don't know. He hasn't been questioned yet."

"Too weak to talk, eh?"

"He's pretty well done up."

"Must have been in the boat several days without anything to eat or drink."

"I guess so."

"Hi, you Billee," sung out Ching Ling, the Chink cook. "Wattee allee samee leady. Takee-way. No wantee pan 'lound here."

As the cook was the boss of the galley, Billy had to close his conversation with Dick and carry the pan of hot water to the pantry, where for the next twenty minutes or so he was busily engaged in washing dishes and scouring the knives with brickdust.

CHAPTER II.

DAVY JONES AND THE SUSAN SCUDDER.

No one, to look at Billy Black, up to his eyes in work in the pantry, would have picked him as the hero of a story book, and yet he is the hero of this story, just the same.

There was more in Billy than appeared on the surface.

He was about as smart as boys of his age come—that is, he was smarter than the average.

He had been up against the rough corners of the world for several years, ever since his widowed mother died and left him a waif in the streets of San Francisco.

He had picked up a whole lot of valuable experience as the architect of his own fortunes before Captain Scott ran across him, took a liking for him, and hired him as cabin boy aboard the brig Malta.

Billy was a great favorite on board from the captain down to the cook, though it is true that he and the Chink had many a scrap in the galley over one thing or another connected with their respective duties.

Billy, of course, had one particular friend, and that was Dick Raymond.

You might call them chums.

This was Dick's second voyage, and he was rated an ordinary seaman.

He was an orphan like Billy, but not exactly alone in the world, for he had an aunt and a sister in San Francisco.

He and Billy got on together in first-class shape, and were always together when their duties permitted.

The brig Malta carried a crew of ten, besides a carpenter, cook, steward, cabin boy, two mates, the skipper and one passenger, Mr. Graham, a civil engineer, who was also something of a naturalist in an amateurish way.

In these days of fast steamships, passengers were uncommon on sailing vessels.

A long sea voyage, however, had been recommended by Mr. Graham's physician as an antidote to too long confinement in his office in San Francisco, and as the civil engineer was well fixed, he turned his share of the business over to his partner to look after and took passage to Melbourne in the Malta, intending to return in her.

Part of Billy's duty was to help Ching Ling in the galley, so, after he got through in the pantry he started forward.

The Chink had cleaned up his department and was sunning himself on a stool outside the galley door, smoking a long Chinese pipe, with a bland look on his Celestial countenance.

"Hello, Ching-a-ling, taking things easy?" grinned Billy, coming to a halt in front of the cook.

"No Ching-a-ling. Me laise blazee you no callee me by light namee," said the Celestial, removing the pipe from his mouth and regarding the boy with a disapproving look.

"Well, Ching Ling, what's on the hooks for dinner?"

"Dinne! How you likee loast beefee, maccaloni, flied lice, lasbelly puddin'? Heap nicee, eh?"

"Oh, rats! What are you giving me?"

"Lats! No lats. Mistee Glaham and skippee no likee lats. S'pose me loast nicee fat lat and puttee him on table with goosebelly sauce, skippee whoopee things up and puttee Ching Ling outee bus'ness so quicke him hair cullee."

"Bet your life he would," chuckled Billy.

"S'pose you gettee pan full spudee, washee and takee skin offee. Keepee you outee mischief."

Billy got a pan of potatoes, washed them and then squatted at the door, knife in hand, and proceeded to peel them, while Ching Ling kept on smoking as if every day was a holiday with him.

While they were thus employed a ghastly-looking face appeared above the combings of the forecastle hatch and the derelict of the sea stepped out rather unsteadily on deck.

Captain Scott, Chief Mate Baxter and Reginald Graham were on the poop at the moment.

The skipper's sharp eyes detected the man who had been rescued that morning and he sent a sailor to lead him aft.

The captain met him in the waist of the vessel.

"How are you feeling, my man?" he asked, kindly, not-

withstanding that the fellow inspired a feeling of repulsion.

"Better," growled the derelict, blinking at the skipper.

"What's your name?"

"Davy Jones," replied the man, solemnly.

Captain Scott looked at him pretty hard.

"Well, you came mighty near going to your namesake at the bottom of the sea," he said, somewhat dryly. "How came you to be afloat all by yourself in that boat?"

Jones rolled his eyes around the deck, and over the bulwark at the sea, before making any reply.

Whether he was trying to recollect the circumstances, or was endeavoring to hatch up some yarn to fill the bill, no one but himself could tell.

Finally he said he had been wrecked.

"What was the name of your vessel?" asked the captain.

It took Jones a whole minute before he could recall the name, then he said it was the Golden Hope.

"The Golden Hope," mused Captain Scott, to whom the name was not familiar. "Where from and where bound?"

That seemed to be a poser for the derelict, for he scratched his stubbly chin, looked about him in a helpless way, and finally said he had forgotten.

"Don't you remember where you shipped at?"

"Sydney," replied Jones, after scratching his head.

"Was she bound for San Francisco or some South American port?"

"San Francisco," stammered the derelict.

"What was your rating on board—ordinary seaman or an A. B.?"

"Sailor," replied Jones.

That wasn't very explicit, but it was all the skipper could get out of him.

"The vessel was lost, you say? How?"

"Sunk," answered Jones, laconically.

"In a gale?"

The derelict nodded.

"What became of the officers and the rest of the crew?"

Jones didn't seem to know what had become of them.

"There must have been others besides yourself in that boat when you left the ship. What became of them?"

The derelict said he was the only one in the boat.

"Why didn't some of the others get in, too?"

Jones couldn't say why they didn't.

He was very much confused at the time and didn't exactly remember what happened.

Captain Scott stared at the man.

Not one of the fellow's replies conveyed the slightest bit of information that could be inserted in the brig's log beyond the name of the lost vessel, her port of departure and her probable destination.

At that moment Dick Raymond, who had been an interested listener, went over to the boat in which the derelict had been found and examined her.

"Beg your pardon, Cap'n Scott," he said, coming back, "that boat didn't belong to a vessel called the Golden Hope. There's a name on her stern, almost rubbed out, and it reads Susan Scudder, sir."

Davy Jones gave the boy a vindictive look and seemed about to say something, but didn't.

"How do you account for that, Jones?" demanded the captain, sharply.

The derelict couldn't account for it, and didn't attempt to.

"What was the name of the captain of the Golden Hope?" asked the skipper, eyeing the man closely.

The derelict appeared to be uneasy under the questioning.

After a moment's hesitation he said the captain's name was Cogswell.

"Billy!" called the skipper.

"Yes, sir," replied the boy, putting down the pan of potatoes and coming forward.

"Go into my stateroom, and on a shelf you will find the shipping register. Bring it here," said Captain Scott.

Billy hurried away and presently returned with the book.

The captain, who had been watching Davy Jones intently, more than half convinced that the fellow was a downright rascal and that all his answers were lies, took the book and looked for the Susan Scudder in the list.

He found there was such a vessel, as he had expected.

She was a small bark and her captain's name was Cogswell.

"Are you sure that your vessel's name wasn't the Susan Scudder and not the Golden Hope?" he asked, severely.

"No, it wasn't," replied Jones, sulkily.

At that moment the lookout's voice rang out sharp and shrill: "Sail ho!"

"Where away?" shouted Chief Mate Baxter from the poop.

"Dead ahead, sir."

"What does she look like?"

"Bark, sir. Somethin' wrong about her. Some of the sails brailled up. She's fillin' one moment and goin' off the next."

The mate sprang into the rigging and went up to the main top, where he stood and sighted the distant sail through his glass.

Captain Scott, rather disgusted by the replies he had received from Jones, told Billy to get the man something to eat, and then returned to the poop deck, where he hailed the mate and asked for information about the craft ahead.

Baxter told him that the bark was acting queerly, as if the wheel was deserted, and that there were other things about her which seemed to call for an investigation.

When he came down the captain took the glass and examined the vessel.

He was satisfied that there was something radically wrong about her.

As the brig was heading for her it seemed likely they would soon find out what the trouble was.

When the lookout sung out that there was a bark ahead, an uneasy expression appeared on Davy Jones's face.

It was a hunted look, like that of a fugitive who feels that his foes are closing in upon him.

A dangerous glint shot from his shifty eyes, and he stood with his fists clenched, not unlike some fierce animal driven to bay.

"Want something to eat?" asked Billy, going up to him, but clearly not relishing the job.

The derelict glared at him with a murderous light in his eyes.

"Eat!" he mumbled. "Get me somethin' to drink. Get me brapdy. Brandy, d'ye hear?"

Billy heard him.

He would have been deaf if he hadn't.

"Come with me to the pantry and you shall have some," he said.

Davy Jones, with a startled glance over his shoulder, slouched after the boy.

Billy led him to the pantry, where the steward was reading an old magazine, and handed the man over to that individual.

"The cap'n said he was to have something to eat, Mr. Cox. He's asked for brandy. Better give him some to brace him up. He's in bad shape after his spell in the boat. He looks like a ghost."

The steward told Jones to sit down and then opened a locker and got out the brandy bottle.

Billy thought he was not needed and returned to the deck.

The brig was coming up with the bark hand-over-hand, and now everybody on board could see that the distant craft was acting very strangely.

She was headed toward the brig, but yawed about like a drunken sailor.

The captain and chief mate examined her deck repeatedly with the glass, but could see no sign of life aboard of her.

"She seems to be deserted," said Captain Scott.

"Ay, ay; that's what she does," nodded the mate.

At length they were close enough to her to read the gilt name on her bows which flashed in the sun.

"Why, it's the Susan Scudder!" exclaimed the skipper, in surprise, handing the glass to Mr. Baxter.

"It is, indeed," replied the mate.

"There's some mystery here," said Captain Scott, thoughtfully; "and I'll wager Davy Jones, if that's his right name, knows something about it."

CHAPTER III.

A FLOATING CHARNEL-HOUSE.

Captain Scott ordered a boat lowered and requested the second mate, who had just come on deck, to board the bark and see what was the matter with her.

Mr. Jordan picked out Dick Raymond and three other sailors to accompany him.

Billy, who was extremely curious to see what was wrong with the Susan Scudder, asked and received permission to go in the boat.

He slid down into her with the nimbleness of a young monkey just as she was about to push off.

It was seen that one boat was missing from the davits of the bark, and Captain Scott was of the opinion that he had that boat on his own deck.

The falls were swinging about close to the water, and it was toward them that the second mate directed the boat's head.

Making fast to one of them Mr. Jordan shinned up the ropes, followed by Dick, Billy and two of the sailors, the five stepping on the deck one after the other.

"There doesn't seem to be anybody aboard," remarked Billy to Dick.

"That's right, unless they're below; but in that case it's mighty strange that the wheel is deserted. It isn't even lashed," replied Dick.

The mate, after glancing around the deck, made for the cabin door.

The moment he entered the passage his nose was assailed by a strong and decidedly unpleasant odor, very similar to, but more pronounced than, the smell that hangs around a receiving vault in a cemetery.

"Suffering Moses!" exclaimed Billy, who, with Dick, was at his heels. "There's something rank in the cabin. What do you suppose it is, Dick?"

"Smells like a morgue," replied Dick.

"Like two morgues, you mean," answered Billy.

The three were prepared to see several corpses in the cabin, but when they reached it they saw that the place was quite empty.

"I expected to see a dozen stiffs in here," said Billy, "but there doesn't seem to be any. The death-house smell, though, is something fierce."

After gazing around the vacant cabin the mate went direct to what he judged to be the door of the captain's cabin and threw it open.

The stench that blew out into their faces nearly knocked them down.

"Jumping Christopher!" gasped Billy. "What are we up against? This must be a floating cemetery."

They soon found out that it was.

The putrifying body of a man, evidently the captain of the bark, lay half dressed in his bunk.

After one hurried glance at the body, the mate pushed the boys back and slammed the door.

There were four other doors opening off the cabin, two on either side.

In each of these was found a dead body.

Two appeared to be the mates, and the other two seemed to be passengers.

Two doors communicating with rooms off the passage held the corpses of the carpenter and the steward.

The carpenter was lying in his shirt sleeves across a tool chest.

A flat lead pencil was clutched between the fingers of his right hand, while a piece of brown paper lay spread out on the chest.

He had died while in the act of writing something.

Mr. Jordan saw some words on the paper and snatched it up.

With Dick and Billy looking over his shoulder he read the following:

"We've all been poisoned by that accursed cook, D——"

That was all, but it was enough to indicate that a terrible crime had been committed by someone.

The mate folded up the paper and put it in his pocket.

"You are witnesses, my lads," he said, turning to the boys, "under what circumstances I found that paper."

Billy and Dick said they were.

The three then went on deck and found the two sailors looking white and scared by the bulwark.

"The fok's'l is full of corpses," quavered one. "There must be eight or ten of them lying in their bunks or doubled up on the deck. It's the worst sight I have ever seen, and I hope I may never see another like it."

The mate looked at him without saying anything or seemingly surprised at the intelligence.

In fact, it was nothing more than he expected.

When he recovered his self-poise he ordered the sailors, including Billy, to work the yards around so as to heave the vessel to, and he went to the wheel to assist the maneuver.

As soon as the bark's way through the water and her erratic movements were stopped, Mr. Jordan lashed the wheel in position.

"Say, this vessel has horrors enough aboard to give a chap the creeps," said Billy to Dick.

"I should remark that she has," coincided his friend. "She ought to be called the coffin bark."

"What do you think about it? Do you know I have an idea that the chap we saved this morning, who calls himself Davy Jones, could tell something about this tragedy if he chose," said Billy.

"That's my idea, too. He's a villainous-looking rascal. I'd be willing to bet a thousand dollars that he was the cook of this hooker, and that out of revenge for some punishment he may have got, he poisoned the officers and crew."

"I'll bet he did. When I asked him awhile ago if he wanted something to eat he gave me a look that almost froze my blood. I tell you he's a bad one."

"He's guilty beyond any doubt. There's circumstantial evidence enough to convict him before any jury. He said he came from a vessel called the Golden Hope and yet the boat we picked him up in came from this bark."

"Of course it did. It has the name Susan Scudder on the stern. It's not very clear, but it's there, just the same. Then the davits show that one boat is missing. I wonder what the cap'n will do with him when Mr. Jordan makes his report?"

"Board up a corner of the fok's'l, and keep him a prisoner. Then when we reach Melbourne turn him over to the authorities, with the evidence that's against him."

"The worst of it is, if he's tried for this wholesale murder, a colonial jury may give him the benefit of the doubt, as there is no direct evidence against him."

"In which case he would go free."

"Of course. It was a crazy act of his to leave this craft in a small boat without water or provisions, but I guess he couldn't remain in the bark with his victims. I suppose he was afraid, too, of this vessel being overhauled by some other vessel, like ours, for instance, and he figured if he was the only man found alive aboard he would naturally be called upon to give an account of the state of things. He chose to risk starving to death at sea rather than face the questions that he judged would be fired at him."

Dick nodded as if he agreed with Billy's summing up of the case.

The mate, having finished lashing the wheel, returned to the waist, where the boys and other sailors stood awaiting his further orders.

He ordered them all into the boat.

He slid down into the boat last and told the men to shove off.

The Malta was hove to also about a quarter of a mile away, and it only took a few lusty strokes with the oars to put them alongside of her again.

Telling all hands to remain in the boat, the mate climbed up to the deck and went to Captain Scott to report the gruesome discoveries he had made aboard the bark.

CHAPTER IV.

ON BOARD THE SUSAN SCUDDER.

Captain Scott expected to hear something of an unusual nature from his second mate, but he was hardly prepared for the ghastly facts that Mr. Jordan had to tell.

He, the chief mate and Reginald Graham listened to Mr. Jordan's story with astonishment and a thrill of horror.

The second mate exhibited the sheet of brown paper on which the bark's carpenter had traced his uncompleted message accusing the vessel's cook of poisoning all hands.

Was it the act of an irresponsible brain, or the deliberate purpose of a scoundrel?

Was it possible that any man was so utterly depraved as to commit such wholesale slaughter, and what motive had prompted him to do it?

The finger of suspicion pointed almost unerringly at the disreputable fellow who had been picked up that morning in the boat that clearly belonged to the bark.

When questioned his attitude and answers had been exceedingly shifty, and left the impression that he was not telling the truth.

He insisted that he was a survivor of a vessel called the *Golden Hope*, Captain Coggsell, which had foundered in a recent gale, yet the boat in which he had been found practically proved his statement to be a lie.

If, as appearances seemed to show, he was the only person who had left the *Susan Scudder* alive, how was it that he had escaped the fate that had befallen all the others aboard that unfortunate vessel unless—he was the person who was responsible for the death of all on board?

Captain Scott determined to question him again, and sent a sailor to fetch him on to the poop deck.

The seaman went to the pantry where he was supposed to be, but the steward said that the derelict had left after drinking a considerable quantity of brandy and eating a handful of crackers.

He had taken a pocketful of crackers away with him, and the steward supposed that he had returned to the deck.

The sailor then visited the forecabin and looked it over thoroughly, but the man was not there.

Suspecting that the fellow might have made so free as to enter the cabin, the foremast hand returned aft and walked into the cabin.

Davy Jones was not there.

The sailor looked into the four small staterooms, and the larger one occupied by the captain, but there was no sign of the man he was in search of.

So he returned to the poop deck and reported to the skipper that he could not find the rescued man.

Captain Scott was much put out and rather angry.

He immediately ordered a more exhaustive search under the direction of the chief mate.

While it was going on the second mate asked the captain what he proposed to do about the bark.

There seemed to be nothing the matter with her that could not be remedied by the removal of the putrifying corpses, but that was a job the sailors would not take kindly to.

Captain Scott felt that it would be money in his pocket

and that of the owners of the *Malta* if he took possession of the *Susan Scudder* and sailed her into port.

The salvage would be considerable, since the bark was in first-rate condition.

The trouble was that he could but ill spare the hands necessary to undertake the job.

However, he believed that he could manage it somehow.

It was really his duty, as well as his interest, to save such a staunch craft.

The first thing was to get rid of the dead bodies, and he gave Mr. Jordan orders to that effect.

Billy Black and Dick Raymond were ordered out of the boat and two able-bodied sailors sent to take their places.

The second mate then returned to the bark and began his gruesome work.

Billy did not resume his work in the galley, as he had his regular duties in the pantry and cabin to attend to, for the dinner hour was close at hand.

Nothing came of the search for Davy Jones.

He had disappeared as completely as though he had never existed.

The mate and his men could not imagine where he had hidden himself, since they had examined about every available spot, even the lazarette where the brig's stores were kept, entrance to which was through the trap-door in front of the companion stairs leading to the poop deck near the wheel.

The search was finally abandoned for the time being, but the captain had no idea of allowing such a rascal as he was believed to be to remain at large in the vessel if he could help it.

In due time dinner was served in the cabin.

Before it was over the second mate returned from the bark and reported that the five bodies in the cabin had been disposed of.

He turned over to Captain Scott the *Susan Scudder's* log book and various books and papers he had found in the captain's stateroom.

Among them was the bark's articles signed by every man connected with the craft, showing his rating and the wages he had shipped for.

The cook's signature was down there in black and white.

His name was not Davy Jones, but Dirk Hatterick.

Captain Scott was convinced that the derelict was the bark's cook, and that he had lied about his name as he had about everything else.

The chief mate, with four different members of the crew, returned to the *Susan Scudder* in place of Mr. Jordan, the second mate eating his dinner and then taking charge of the afternoon watch, in his regular line of duty.

Ever since the *Malta* had come up with the bark the wind had been dropping, and the weather now was almost a calm.

Through his telescope the captain could see the four sailors under Mr. Baxter bringing the bodies out of the forecabin one by one and tossing them into the sea.

Finally the disagreeable job was finished, but the chief mate and his men remained aboard of the bark trying to sweeten things up until the *Malta's* bell announced the hour of four, and the beginning of the first dog watch—four to six.

The *Susan Scudder* was then left to herself.

When Mr. Baxter returned the captain consulted with

him as to what part of the brig's company should be told off to take charge of the bark.

It was decided that the second mate and four hands was all that could be spared for the purpose.

When Billy Black found that his friend Dick had been selected as one of the four he asked Captain Scott to let him go along, too.

The captain consented, as he thought he could spare Billy under the circumstances, and his presence aboard the bark would be a great help to Mr. Jordan.

Indeed, Billy was a pretty fair cook, as well as something of a sailor in a small way, so that he was likely to prove very useful in an all-around capacity.

So, after supper, in the second dog watch, Billy got his bag, containing all his belongings, and went in the boat which had brought the derelict to the Malta early that morning, and which now carried the people that were to work the Susan Scudder into port to their new quarters.

The wind having sprung up again after sundown, the two vessels were put on their course, with lights displayed aloft and below to keep one another in sight during the night.

Mr. Jordan, Dick and another sailor constituted the first watch, from eight o'clock until midnight, when the other two able-bodied seamen were to stand the middle watch, from midnight till four in the morning, after which the others were to go on again.

Billy was not assigned to either watch, as he would be busy all day.

The cabin and the staterooms had been aired out as well as circumstances permitted after the removal of the bodies, but the odor down there was still pretty rank.

The cabin itself was not so bad, as the bark being under way a breeze swept in through the passage and thence up through the companion-way after circulating about the place.

The forecastle was not to be used during the trip, for there was plenty of room in the cabin to accommodate all hands.

Nothing, however, would induce the two seamen to take possession of the bunks of the late carpenter and the steward, in the rooms off the passage, which had been allotted to them.

Whether this was because of the smell that clung to them, or because of superstitious fears, we cannot say, but we imagine both had something to do with it.

In fact, the two seamen wouldn't stay under cover, but brought their bedding to the top of the poop and went to sleep there.

The mate stood the first trick at the wheel, and while he steered Dick was stationed forward on the lookout upon the forecastle.

"Say, we'll have a great time on this hooker, don't you think, Dick?" said Billy, who kept his chum company.

"Sure, as long as the weather holds fair," replied Dick; "but if a heavy gale comes on we're so shorthanded that none of us will see any fun in the change."

"I didn't think of that," answered Billy, scratching his chin. "We'll have our hands full when it blows hard."

"Oh, the mate will shorten sail the moment he sees any indication of a coming blow. He can't afford to take any chances. If a storm was to catch us unawares we might

broach to and go to the bottom before we knew where we were."

"That's right," nodded Billy. "Say, where do you suppose Davy Jones has hidden himself aboard the Malta? The chief mate and a couple of the men searched the whole vessel above hatches and they couldn't find a trace of him."

"How should I know where he's stowed? If I had had any idea I would have told Mr. Baxter, of course. They'll catch him, though, when hunger drives him out of his nest."

"Do you think he could have got into the main hold through the lazarette?"

"I shouldn't think so, but I can't swear he didn't. There might be a loose board in the bulkhead that he discovered."

"He's a pretty hard rascal, don't you think?"

"Bet your life he is. A fellow capable of poisoning a whole ship's company is about as bad as they come in this world."

"I hope the cap'n will do his best to try and fasten the crime on him, because I don't think there's the least doubt of his guilt."

"The cap'n will make things hot for——"

A loud racket in the forecastle under them cut his words short.

It only lasted for a moment, but it was too plain to be disregarded.

"Did you hear that?" asked Dick, in an awe-struck tone.

"I did," replied Billy. "It was a noise in the fok's'l."

"What could have caused it?"

"Search me. Something must have fallen down."

"There's nobody down there to make anything fall."

"Might be rats from the hold after the dead bodies that are no longer there."

"That's so. Then it might be——"

"What?" asked Billy, as his companion paused.

"The ghosts of the dead men moving around their old quarters."

"Stuff! I don't believe in any such—oh, lor'! Look there!"

He pointed at the hatchway leading down into the fore-castle.

A human-looking object was just rising through it.

The moment Dick's eyes rested on it his hair began to rise with sudden fright and he let out a wild yell.

The object, whose back was presented to the boys, turned its face around quickly and then disappeared like a flash.

CHAPTER V.

THE GHOST OF THE BARK.

Dick's yell was loud enough to attract the attention of the mate, and not being able to fathom the meaning of it he sent the other member of the watch forward to find out what it meant.

While he was on his way Dick was all of a funk over the apparition.

"The bark is haunted!" he gasped.

If Billy hadn't seen the alleged specter he would have laughed at his companion.

As it was, he didn't know what to think.

Up to that moment he had never believed in ghosts, but this ocular demonstration rather staggered him.

There was not a soul supposed to be in the bark but the

brig's people, and Billy knew none of them was in the forecandle.

He doubted if one of them, with the possible exception of Mr. Jordan, who was not bothered with superstitious fancies, could have been induced to enter the forecandle alone after dark.

Therefore, the appearance of a man up the ladder was inexplicable to him.

Then, again, had he been a real flesh-and-blood man why should he disappear so suddenly?

Billy gazed spellbound at the forecandle hatch and wondered if he had really seen anything.

"The bark is haunted!" repeated Dick, with chattering teeth. "The fok's'l is full of the ghosts of her dead crew. Oh, lor'! I wish I hadn't come aboard."

At that point the other sailor appeared and asked what was the matter.

"We've seen a ghost," quavered Dick.

"A ghost!" exclaimed the A. B., whose name was Bob Backstay.

"Yes. The fok's'l is full of 'em."

Backstay, who was as superstitious as most sailors, looked at the open hatch and edged away from it.

"What did you see?" he asked hoarsely.

"Ask Billy."

"What did you see, Billy?"

"I don't know whether I saw anything, but I think I did," replied the boy.

"You did see something, for you called my attention to it, and then I saw it," said Dick.

"What was it like?" asked Backstay.

"It was a man," said Billy.

"A man! There isn't any one 'board the bark but ourselves."

"He was an awful-looking man," interjected Dick, "as big as a house, with eyes——"

"No, he wasn't as big as a house," replied Billy. "He was just ordinary size."

Dick insisted that the apparition was twice as big as any man he'd ever seen, and that his eyes were as big as moons.

"Say, Backstay, s'pose you remain here and let us go aft and tell Mr. Jordan about the ghost," said Dick.

"Not much," replied the sailor, hastily. "I ain't got no orders to stay here. I'm goin' back to report."

He turned on his heel and hurried away, leaving the two boys to talk the matter over and try to find a solution of the mystery.

Bob Backstay came back inside of ten minutes and told Billy that the mate wanted to see him.

"You stay here with me, Backstay," said Dick, and the sailor consented.

Billy told the mate about the presumed ghost, and Mr. Jordan ridiculed the idea.

"There must be a live man in the fok's'l," he said. "Just hold the wheel while I go forward and investigate."

The mate went to the galley, got a lantern, which he lighted, and then proceeded to the forecandle hatch.

"Come with me, Backstay," he said, starting to descend into the foul-smelling sailors' parlor.

A sailor is accustomed to obey orders whether he likes to or not, and so Backstay accompanied the officer below.

Mr. Jordan flashed the light into every nook and corner of the forecandle, but without result.

The place was not tenanted.

If there had been a man there it was certain he would have found him, therefore he was satisfied that the two boys had really seen nothing.

He left Backstay on the lookout in Dick's place, and put the young sailor at the wheel, telling Billy to turn in for the night.

Billy turned into the carpenter's bunk and slept like a top till sunrise, when he was aroused by Dick.

"See any more ghosts?" grinned Billy.

"No," answered Dick, shaking his head disapprovingly at his chum's jesting tone.

"Mr. Jordan doesn't believe we saw anything, anyway."

"We saw it, all right. If it wasn't a ghost he would have found someone in the fok's'l when he and Backstay went down there. The ship is haunted, mark my words," he added, solemnly. "Why wouldn't it be after the whole-sale murder that was done?"

Billy admitted that there was every reason why the bark should be haunted if there was such a thing as dead people coming back to their earthly stamping-grounds.

He had no time to argue the point, as it was necessary for him to prepare breakfast for the people on board.

There was a bountiful supply of stores from which to draw, and so Billy had no trouble in getting up a creditable meal for all hands.

Dick laid the table in the cabin and everybody but the steersman sat down to it at once.

The brig was clearly a better sailer than the Susan Scudder, for she was miles ahead when the sun rose that morning, and she gradually increased her lead till by noon she looked like a bird's wing on the distant horizon.

When Billy returned to the galley with a pan full of dirty dishes he looked in at the cooking-room in some surprise.

Something had happened there while he was in the cabin.

The coffee pot he had left on the stove was lying on its side on the floor.

A can of preserved tongue he had opened but did not use had vanished.

A small bag of crackers he had brought there for his own use had disappeared likewise.

A number of things were also disarranged.

Somebody had evidently been there, but who?

Not one of the brig's people, that was certain.

Who else, then?

At that juncture Dick came along with a second batch of dirty dishes and Billy explained the condition of things.

"Ghosts!" gurgled Dick.

"Bosh!" replied Billy. "Ghosts don't eat."

"How do you know they don't?"

"How can they? There's nothing to them."

"That spook looked pretty solid last night."

"I don't believe it was a spook. It's my opinion there's some live man aboard this bark who is afraid to show himself."

"What makes you think there is?"

"Because I don't believe that chap we saw last night was a ghost, and because of what's missing in the food line from the galley here."

"The chap we saw started to come out of the fok's'l and

went back again, consequently if he'd been a real man Mr. Jordan would have found him down there when he investigated the place with the lantern."

"I'll bet there's a way of getting out of the fok's'l besides the hatch," nodded Billy, in a positive manner. "I'm going to ask Mr. Jordan to examine the place thoroughly to-day. I'd like to bet he'll find an opening into the hold."

"Why should there be a man aboard who is afraid to show himself?" asked Dick.

"Ask me something easier. If I was a mind reader I might be able to tell you."

"I think you're off your base."

"All right. Think so. I've got no time to argue the matter further. Get me some water to put on the stove. You might as well make yourself useful while you're around here."

An hour later Billy reported the facts to Mr. Jordan, and the mate was inclined to agree with him—that there was a man on board who had reasons for keeping himself out of sight.

With two sailors he made another and more searching investigation of the forecabin.

No opening of any kind was found through the bulkhead into the hold.

A couple of loose boards were found which, on being pushed aside, revealed a way of passing into the hold.

The mate went through with the lantern, and found that he could crawl over the top tier of the cargo, though the space was narrow and did not seem to lead to any place in particular.

He wormed his way straight ahead, revolver in one hand and the lantern in the other, followed by Billy, armed with a heavy poker from the galley.

Suddenly he came to a break in the cargo and flashed the light down into it.

There, crouching like a wild beast in his lair, with a glittering knife in his hand and a fiendish scowl on his ugly countenance, was a man whom Mr. Jordan recognized, much to his surprise, as Davy Jones.

CHAPTER VI.

DAVY JONES HAS SOMETHING TO SAY TO BILLY AND DICK.

"So, it's you, eh?" said the mate.

Jones made no answer, nor did he move.

"How did you get aboard this bark, and why are you hiding down here?"

The derelict blinked wickedly up at the mate, but did not open his mouth.

Billy wriggled forward on hearing Mr. Jordan addressing somebody in the cargo.

He was extremely curious to learn who the stowaway was.

That the person was the ghost of last night he was fully satisfied.

When he reached a position where he could look down into the hole the boy gave a gasp of astonishment.

He had not suspected that the ghost might be Davy Jones.

He believed that rascal to be aboard the brig.

Yet here he was, as disreputable and villainous as ever.

"Come, now, you rascal, get out of that hole. Start yourself!" cried the mate.

Jones uttered a snarl like that of a ferocious beast, and sprang at the mate with his knife.

Then he fell back with a baffled cry, for he found himself covered by the shining tube of a six-shooter.

"Drop that knife or I'll break your arm with a ball," said Mr. Jordan, sternly.

Jones shot a venomous glance at the mate and clung to his weapon.

Billy slipped back and then crawled around until he got behind the scoundrel.

Leaning over he struck Jones's arm a smart blow with the poker.

The fellow uttered a cry of pain and dropped the knife, which fell into a hole among the bags composing that part of the cargo and disappeared.

"Come out!" thundered the mate. "I'll give you one minute to decide whether you'll come alive or dead."

Jones was at the end of his tether, so he sullenly obeyed the mandate.

"Go ahead, Billy," said Mr. Jordan, "and stand ready to hold this chap as I drive him out of the hold."

Billy crawled as fast as he could to the opening into the forecabin and entered the sailors' quarters, where he found the two sailors waiting.

"We've caught the ghost," he said. "Who do you suppose it is?"

"How could we tell?" said Bob Backstay.

"It's the chap we saved from the boat yesterday morning—Davy Jones."

"How came he aboard this craft?" asked Backstay.

"That's a mystery he'll have to explain himself, if he will."

Davy Jones's hard-looking countenance now appeared at the opening.

He looked at Billy and the two sailors and paused.

The mate, however, spurred him on from behind, and he crawled through into the forecabin.

Mr. Jordan followed.

The mate ordered Billy and the two sailors on deck.

Then he drove Jones up the ladder.

"Now, you rascal, are you going to explain how you got aboard this vessel, and why you have been hiding in the hold?"

"No, I'm not," hissed Jones. "You can shoot me if you want but you'll never get anythin' out of me."

Mr. Jordan saw that the fellow meant what he said, and as he had no intention of shooting the scoundrel he dropped that line of inquiry.

"Look here, my man, I've looked at the bark's articles and found no one by the name of Davy Jones on the list. Isn't it a fact that you were the cook of this vessel, and that your name is Dirk Hatterick?"

"No," snarled the derelict.

"So you won't tell us anything about yourself?"

"No."

"Then you can't blame us for regarding you as a suspicious character. It is my opinion that you are Dirk Hatterick, the cook of this bark, and it is also my opinion that you know something about the death of the bark's company. To put the matter in the plainest terms, John Wales, the carpenter of the vessel, before he died, accused you in writing of poisoning everybody on board."

"It's a lie!" hissed Jones. "An infernal lie! I'll have your life for sayin' it!"

He sprang at the mate like a wild animal, with his arms outstretched and his fingers clawing the air.

A murderous light glared from his eyes that showed he meant mischief.

Mr. Jordan changed the revolver to his left hand, and doubling up his right fist, struck the rascal a heavy blow between the eyes.

He dropped to the deck like a log and rolled over unconscious.

"Get a piece of rope and bind the scoundrel hand and foot," said the mate to Bob Backstay.

The sailor obeyed.

"Carry him into the fok's'l, and toss him on to one of the bunks."

The order was carried out, and there he was left to recover his wits at his leisure.

"I'll bet a dollar that you won't see or hear any more ghosts aboard this bark," said Billy to Dick, after the excitement was over.

"I don't know about that," replied Dick, doubtfully.

"If you don't, I do. It's about time that you got rid of such superstitious nonsense. When a person is dead he's dead for good. His soul goes to another place, and he's done with this world for good and all."

"If that is so why have ghosts been seen hundreds of times?"

"Is there any real evidence that they have?"

"Yes, I've read a hundred stories about ghosts appearing to different people."

"You read a lot of rot that wasn't true."

"How do you know that it wasn't true?"

"Common sense tells me so. You were willing to swear that the figure we saw last night standing in the fok's'l opening was a real ghost, yet it has turned out to be a live man—Davy Jones, who I guess is really Dirk Hatterick."

"That doesn't prove that there isn't such things as real ghosts," persisted Dick, who wouldn't yield his point.

"Say, there isn't much use of talking to you on the subject, so we'll cut it out. Let's see where the brig is by this time."

With the naked eye the Malta looked to be a mere speck on the horizon.

"She'll beat us into Melbourne by a week," said Billy.

"What of it? If this weather holds we'll have a snap aboard this old hooker. We'll escape a whole lot of work the other chaps will have to do on the brig."

"You may, but I won't," replied Billy; "so, to save you from getting rusty, I'm going to make you lend me a hand whenever you have nothing better to do."

"All right. I'm willing to do that," replied Dick, with a cheerful grin.

By the time Billy announced that dinner was ready the last traces of the brig Malta had vanished below the distant horizon line.

For several days all went well aboard the Susan Scudder.

The weather was all that could be desired, and the sailors had an easy time of it, for they were not called upon to start a single sheet.

About all the work there was going fell to Billy's lot, but he never made a kick, for he wasn't built that way.

He made Dick turn to and help him out, and the two boys managed to extract considerable pleasure out of their labors.

There were no further ghostly manifestations of any kind aboard the bark, and the sailors got over their first disinclination to sleep in the rooms off the passage and the cabin.

"Things are going swimmingly," remarked Billy one night after he and Dick had cleaned up everything for the night and were seated at the door of the galley, looking up at the starlit sky, with the brilliant southern cross showing above the horizon, and listening to the hum of the wind playing through the rigging.

"Tip top, but I'm afraid it's too good to last," replied Dick.

"Well, I don't suppose we can hold this weather all the way to Melbourne," admitted Billy; "still, it doesn't follow that we'll get into a severe storm if our luck runs fairly even."

At that moment Bob Backstay came from the direction of the forecandle.

"Davy Jones wants to speak to you chaps in the fok's'l," he said, with a grin.

"Wants to speak to us!" cried Billy, in astonishment.

"That's what he said. He hailed me just now and asked me to pass the word to you."

"Is this one of your jokes, Bob Backstay?" asked Dick.

"Nary joke, shipmate. Just you step to the hatch and see if I ain't told you the gospel truth."

The sailor walked off with the rolling gait of an old shell-back and the boys looked at each other.

It was certainly a remarkable circumstance that Davy Jones should have asked to see them in the forecandle, where he had been confined ever since he was routed out of the hold that morning.

He had maintained a sulky, defiant demeanor toward everyone since that day, and had scarcely noticed Billy and Dick when they waited on him with his meals.

Mr. Jordan had paid him one visit in an effort to get him to say something about himself, but he wouldn't open his mouth except to mutter some imprecations on the mate's inquisitiveness.

"Say, what do you s'pose is in the wind?" said Billy.

"I'll never tell you. Are you going to accommodate him with an interview?"

"I guess we might just as well hear what he has to say," replied Billy.

"Then come along."

They walked over to the open hatch.

"Hello, below!" shouted Billy.

"Come down here," came back the voice of Davy Jones.

"What do you want with us?" inquired Billy, when he and Dick stood before the bunk on which the derelict was reclining.

"I want to talk with you both."

"Talk away, then. We'll listen to you."

"First of all, can either of you tell me what latitude and longitude this here bark is in now?"

"What do you want to know that for?" asked Billy.

"I'd like to get the hooker's bearin's if you don't mind," replied Jones with a grin which looked particularly wicked under the dim glow of the lantern swinging from the ceiling not far above his head.

"I don't know the latitude and longitude," said Billy. "Do you, Dick?"

"I know what the bark's position was at noon to-day when the mate took his observations," replied Dick.

"What was it?" asked Jones, eagerly.

"Longitude, 170 degrees, 5 minutes west; latitude, 26 degrees, 18 minutes, south."

Jones repeated the words and figures, as if to fix them in his mind, then turning his glittering black and snaky eyes on the two boys, said:

"How would you like to be rich?"

"Rich!" they exclaimed in a breath.

"Yes. How would you like to have all the gold you could spend for the rest of your natural life?"

"We'd like it first-rate," chuckled Billy.

"The chance is yours," replied Jones, meaningly.

"How?" asked Billy, opening his eyes pretty wide.

"I know an island not far from here where seven kegs of gold money are concealed in a marine cavern. I've got the latitude and longitude of it in my head, and could go there if I had a compass and a boat."

"You could!" cried Billy.

Jones nodded.

"I guess you're raving. What kind of a ghost story are you giving us, anyway?"

"You don't believe my story?"

"Hardly. It's too fishy. How did the seven kegs of gold get in the marine cavern of the island, and how came you to know they're there?"

"That's my business," growled the derelict.

"What's the name of the island?"

"I don't mind tellin' you that, 'cause it ain't down on any map by the name I've given it."

"What name did you give it?" asked Billy, curiously.

"Skeleton Island," replied Davy Jones, with a sardonic grin.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SUSAN SCUDDER GOES ASHORE.

"Skeleton Island!" exclaimed Billy. "What did you give it that name for? Does it look like a skeleton?"

"No," growled Jones.

"Maybe there's a whole lot of skeletons on it," suggested Dick.

The derelict looked at them in a peculiar way, but said nothing.

"So you say there are seven kegs of gold in a marine cavern, on Skeleton Island?" said Billy, almost derisively.

"Yes, there are," nodded Jones.

"Did you send for us just to tell us that yarn?" asked Billy.

"If you don't believe it there's no call for me to say anythin' more," replied Davy Jones.

"What else have you to tell?"

"I was goin' to tell you how you could each get hold of one of them kegs," said the derelict, enticingly.

"You were?" grinned Billy.

"I was. They would make you both rich."

"Well, how could we get hold of one of those kegs?"

"By goin' to the island with me."

"Going to the island with you, eh?"

"Yes. You've got the run of the bark. You could stow a month's rations away in one of the boats without any trouble. Then you could cut me loose. We'd lower the boat between us. You could get the compass from the binnacle and——"

"Oh, come, now, you're crazy! Suppose we agreed to do as you say, how could I get the compass, or how could we lower the boat without being discovered by one of the watch?"

"You leave that to me. All I need is a knife."

"What would you do with a knife?" asked Billy. "Commit more murder? Say, you take the cake for a hardened scoundrel, you do," the boy added with a look of disgust. "Come along, Dick, let's get out of here."

Jones tried to detain them, but Billy wouldn't listen to him, and the boys returned to their lounging place at the galley doorway.

"What do you think of that old villain, anyway?" Billy said.

"I think he was trying to bribe us to free him," replied Dick.

"With his yarn of seven kegs of gold on Skeleton Island. Ho! ho! He must take us for easy marks."

"Maybe the story is true," answered Dick.

"True!" cried Billy, scornfully.

"Yes. Why did he poison all the people on this bark? He must have had some big object in view, which failed to pan out."

"That's true enough, but he wouldn't have done that merely to get possession of a boat to go and hunt for this Skeleton Island he spoke about. Besides, if that was his object he wouldn't have gone adrift without provisions, or water, or even a compass, which he would need to shape his course by. When we picked him up in the boat he didn't have a thing in it. The only way I can account for that is that he must have gone adrift from this bark before he was ready to leave her."

"If he did that he could have rowed back to her, couldn't he?" said Dick.

"One would think so, for there was a pair of oars in the boat. Altogether, the fellow's movements seem to be surrounded by mystery."

Billy turned in about ten o'clock, and shortly after he was dead to the world the mate noticed a change in the look of the sky.

Only the professional eye of a sailor would have observed any particular difference, but Mr. Jordan saw signs that indicated a probable change in the weather, and a look at the barometer confirmed his suspicions.

Determined to take time by the forelock he called the three men of the other watch and sent his five hands aloft to take a couple of reefs in all the sails.

Nothing more was done till about midnight, when the heavier sails were taken in and made snug, and several reefs were made in the spanker, the large fore-and-aft sail above the poop, and in the flying jib attached to the bowsprit.

Morning broke dull and threatening, with a rough sea on, and half a gale blowing.

That was the state of things when Billy turned out of his bunk, and he was not a little surprised, for when he went to sleep the night before there was no indication of a change of conditions.

"Looks as if we're in for a spell of rough weather," said Dick, as the two boys repaired to the galley to get breakfast under way.

"When did things commence to look squally?" asked Billy.

"About midnight. We took in sail then in order to be on the safe side."

The weather grew worse as morning wore on, and by noon the wind was blowing a full gale.

As the barometer seemed to indicate that there was even worse in store, all the lighter sails were taken in, and the bark plunged through the smother under bare poles with only the closely reefed jib to steady her.

The sea broke so frequently and viciously across the deck that it became necessary to stretch life-lines for the safety of the men.

The sky grew darker as the hours passed until at four o'clock in the afternoon the gloom of night hung over the scene.

The howling wind swept the rain in sheets about the bark, and the outlook for the night looked very black indeed.

Billy didn't make any attempt to reach the galley that afternoon, and the chances that the men would have anything warm for supper, or any supper to speak of, were rather remote.

The fore-castle hatch had been battened down early in the day, and Davy Jones, after having been released from his bonds, was left to himself with a supply of hardtack, a can of preserved meat and a keg of water.

The night closed in at last and the aspect of nature was so black that the bark seemed to be driving through the fabled caves of Erebus.

The wind veered around to another quarter and blew harder, if anything, than ever.

This change created a cross sea, in which the vessel rolled and pitched in a nasty way.

Billy had never before experienced such weather, and as there appeared to be nothing in particular for him to do he turned into his bunk, but found some difficulty in saving himself from being tossed out on the floor.

He lay there as well as he could listening to the thump of the seas against the bark's side, the screech of the gale above, and the many mysterious noises within the vessel until at length the combination of sounds lulled him to sleep.

He might have passed an hour in blissful unconsciousness of the dangers surrounding him when he was awakened in a sudden and startling manner.

The Susan Scudder struck upon a reef surrounding an island, the outlines of which could not be made out in the darkness, and Billy was flung from his bunk against the door of the stateroom like a projectile from a catapult.

The next sea shoved the bark still further on the reef, where she listed to port and remained stationary.

The two masts were snapped off close above the deck by the shock, and smashing the bulwark in their fall were held against the vessel's side by the stout masses of rigging.

Billy knew that some terrible calamity had happened to the bark.

As he lay dazed on the floor of the little room he heard the crash of the masts when they went by the board.

"Great Scott!" he gasped, struggling on his feet. "We're going to the bottom."

That was his impression just then, and it was a reasonable one under the circumstances.

Although he heard the howl of the storm as bad as ever, mingled with the beating of the waves against the starboard side of the vessel, he was conscious that the bark was no longer moving forward at racehorse speed.

That gave him the correct idea that the craft had gone ashore somewhere.

He pulled the door open and dashed out into the sloping cabin.

The swinging light under the skylight was burning away with a steady light, and he looked around the place.

The waves as they broke over the stern of the Susan Scudder flung a considerable quantity of water down the companion stairs each time, and this was washing about the floor of the cabin and gradually growing deeper.

There was not a sign of Mr. Jordan and the men, so he judged they must be on deck unless—and the awful thought staggered him—they had been washed overboard when the bark struck.

He rushed out into the passage, which was also awash, and made his way as far as the doorway.

He could see nothing in the darkness but the white spume of the waves as it was flung over the starboard bulwark which rose in the air at an angle of thirty degrees.

As far as he could make out there wasn't a soul on the deck.

"Great marlinspikes! Has everybody gone to his death but me?" he groaned.

It looked that way, and he did not doubt at that moment that it was only the question of a short time before the vessel would break up and he would follow the others.

He staggered back into the cabin quite overcome by the horror of the moment.

Something impelled him toward the mate's stateroom, as if he thought that Mr. Jordan might be in there.

As he cleared the end of the cabin table he saw an object huddled up at the foot of the companion stairs, just as if it had been flung down there.

He knew it was one of his companions, and he made his way over to the body.

Grasping it by one arm he pulled it toward him and then he saw it was Dick.

The young sailor uttered a groan and began to struggle.

"Dick, Dick, brace up!" cried Billy, not knowing what else to say to his chum.

He pulled his friend into a sitting position and then Dick opened his eyes and looked around.

"That you, Billy?" he said. "Why, I thought we were goners. I was at the wheel with Bob Backstay when the bark struck. The shock was something tremendous. I was pitched clean down the companion ladder and that's all I remember till this moment. The vessel is ashore somewhere. Have you seen Mr. Jordan or any of the others?"

"No. I'm afraid they're lost."

"Lost!" ejaculated Dick. "That would be tough."

"I don't know," replied Billy. "We're not so safe that I can see. I guess we'll all be in the same boat before morning."

"Maybe not, Billy. While there's life there's hope."

"I've heard that when a vessel goes on the rocks in a storm as bad as this one she generally breaks up within a few hours."

"It all depends on how and where she strikes, and how strong her timbers are."

"Well, we can't do anything, Dick, but trust to luck. If the bark should hold together till the gale blows out we'll have a chance for our lives; otherwise it will be all up with us."

Although the boys didn't know it, the gale was on the wane.

Having accomplished the ruin of the Susan Scudder the storm king seemed to be satisfied that he had done enough on this occasion.

The waves, however, continued to spend their fury on the hapless craft, but the rocks shielded her in a measure from their full force, while her stout timbers successfully resisted their impact.

And so, alternately agitated by hope and fear, the boys remained seated on the inclined deck of the cabin until dawn lightened up the face of nature.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PAIR OF SKELETONS.

"I think the gale is breaking up," said Dick.

"About time it was," replied Billy. "I never put in such a night in my life. I'm mighty glad that morning is at hand."

"Let's go on the poop and take a look around."

There were several tons of water in the cabin now, the bulk of it lying against the port side where it rose to the handles of the stateroom doors.

The list of the vessel to port made the deck of the cabin resemble a shelving beach, the water line reaching about two-thirds across the room.

The waves had ceased to come in over the stern, which showed that they struck the reef with much less force than when the bark went on the rocks.

Billy and Dick made their way up the companion stairs and grabbed the spokes of the wheel to support themselves on deck.

The sky was filled with flying scud and there was no sign of the sun as yet.

The ocean tumbled and rolled in a threatening way, exhausting its force on the reefy barrier on which the Susan Scudder rested with a hoarse roar and a cloud of white foam.

When the boys turned and looked in the opposite direction they saw the shaggy outlines of a tropical island lying within the semi-circle of the reef.

It was not yet light enough to make out the island clearly, but it lay about half a mile from the spot where the bark was wrecked, and it seemed to present a rather rocky look as well as the lads could make out.

The stretch of water between the reef and the island was fairly smooth as compared with the ocean outside, the reef acting as a natural breakwater.

The bark lay well out of water from stem to stern, except that being heeled over her entire port side was submerged to the level of the deck.

"We're on a reef," said Billy; "but there's an island

yonder which we ought to reach easily enough, even if we have to swim for it."

"No need of swimming when we've got a boat handy that will answer better," said Dick, pointing to one of the bark's boats on the port side, which was attached to its davits and had defied both storm and wreck.

It was protected by a close-fitting canvas covering that kept out the water.

"That will take us ashore in fine shape," said Billy, enthusiastically. "We'll load her up with food from the pantry. The shelves are full of canned stuff I got out of the lazarette the other day."

"You mean the floor is full of it," grinned Dick. "You won't find much on the shelves in there now, after the shaking up the storm gave us and the shock of the bark going on the rocks."

"Suppose the cans are on the floor, that won't hurt them."

"I guess there's enough food on board to last us a good many months on that island if we have to remain there very long," said Dick.

"Yes, if you count what's in the lazarette; but I guess that's partially flooded with seawater, which is apt to ruin the bags of biscuit and damage the flour."

"It won't hurt the canned goods, at any rate, that's some satisfaction."

As it grew lighter the island developed into a bold and rocky shore, but through frequent breaks in its inhospitable-looking face vistas of luxuriant vegetation in the interior could be seen, which gave the boys a more cheerful idea of its general character.

"We'll probably find groves of breadfruit and bananas on the island," said Billy. "I've read that all these tropical islands in the South Seas are overgrown with fruit enough to keep a small army from starving to death."

"That's right. We'll find coconuts there, too. And shellfish among the rocks at low water. No fear of any one starving to death there even without a supply of canned goods and other modern luxuries," said Dick. "Talking of canned goods and such things reminds me that I feel kind of peckish. I haven't had a square meal since yesterday morning. Let's go to the pantry and fill up."

Billy felt hungry himself and had no objection to adjourning to the pantry, which, being on the starboard side of the bark, stood high out of water.

They descended the companion stairs and made their way to the pantry.

On opening the door a stream of canned goods slid out into the passage.

These were recovered and replaced on the shelves, together with all that they picked up from the floor.

It took them some minutes to straighten up the pantry, and then Billy opened a can of corned beef, and this, with a supply of biscuit, washed down with water from a stationary breaker, constituted their breakfast.

The boys took their time eating, for the weather was too rough yet for them to undertake launching the boat as long as there was no danger of the vessel going to pieces.

The boys wouldn't have minded the wreck, and the prospect of a more or less extended sojourn on the island, if Mr. Jordan and the sailors had not been lost, as they took it for granted that they were.

While they were talking about the sad fate of the mate and seamen, Billy suddenly remembered the rascal who was battened down in the forecabin.

"Say, we forgot all about Davy Jones. We must open up the hatch and see if he's alive," he said.

"I'll bet he's alive," replied Dick. "Those kind of chaps are hard to kill."

"We'll have to let him out; but I hate to have that scamp wandering around at large where we are. He's capable of doing us a lot of harm when we were off our guard. He'd probably steal the boat, and all the provisions he could get hold of, anyhow, and go off hunting that Skeleton Island of his, if there really is such a place."

"Then I guess we need be in no hurry about letting him out if he's alive," said Dick. "He can't starve for a day or two, for we gave him a can of preserved roast beef and a bag of biscuits before we closed him in yesterday morning, which, with the breaker of water, will keep him from going hungry awhile."

So the boys dismissed him from their minds for the present.

After they had eaten all they wanted, they returned to the poop again to see how the weather was getting on.

It had moderated a bit, and the sun was struggling to show his face from behind the clouds that were fast breaking up.

The ocean outside the reef was as tumultuous as ever, and the wind blew pretty stiff.

After hanging around the poop for an hour the boys decided to try and launch the boat.

They found no great difficulty in doing this after getting rid of its canvas cover.

There were two pairs of oars snugly tucked away under the seats, and after the boat was in the water, and dragged around to a broken section of the port bulwark, they got out one pair.

They decided to load her with canned goods and other provender from the pantry, and make their first trip to the island.

Going to work with a will, in three-quarters of an hour they were ready to shove off.

While they were thus employed they heard a thumping on the under part of the forecabin hatch.

"What did I tell you, Billy?" said Dick. "That fellows like Davy Jones were hard to do up. Let him pound away; we won't pay any attention to him now."

"We must try and find some place on the island where we can hide our provisions before we let him out," said Billy. "If we could only discover a place where we could hide the boat, too, I'd like it."

"The two of us ought to be able to haul it so far up on the shore that he could not single-handed get it into the water."

"That wouldn't do. The boat would soon go to pieces out of the water," said Billy.

"That's so," admitted Dick. "I forgot about that. Well, we may find some way of getting around the difficulty."

"I hope so," replied Billy.

They embarked in the boat, shoved off and Dick rowed for the island.

As they drew near the shore they noticed a small creek or inlet which wound in around the rocks.

They decided to follow it to see where it would take them. Passing around a spur of rock they lost sight of the bark and the reef.

Another turn soon afterward brought them in sight of a gloomy-looking hole or watery cavern running right under a cliffy projection.

"We'd better turn around and go back," said Billy, who was crouching in the bows. "We don't want to go into that hole, which may lead all the way under the island."

Dick turned around to look at the cavernous opening.

Just then the boat ran against some kind of an invisible obstruction.

Instantly two ghastly objects shot out of the water directly ahead.

"Great Scott!" gasped Billy, in dismay. "What are we up against?"

"A pair of skeletons!" gurgled Dick, dropping his oars.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAVE ON THE ISLAND.

The two boys gazed on the pair of grinning skeletons with awe and consternation.

Their sudden appearance from the depths of the water fairly staggered them.

The boat had come to a stop, as if held by invisible hands. "Oh, lor'!" palpitated Dick. "This island is haunted. Let's get away as fast as we can."

The arms of the skeletons were up-raised, and they had a frightful grin on their bony countenances that was enough to send the shivers down any one's spinal column.

Billy, who was a pretty level-headed boy, was pretty thoroughly startled even though it was broad daylight.

To behold such uncanny objects pop out of the water, apparently of their own accord, was enough to paralyze any person, however stout his nerves.

As the cabin boy gazed upon them his sharp eyes all at once noticed one peculiar thing about them.

Two of their extended arms, the right wrist bone of one and the left wrist bone of the other, seemed to be held together by a piece of thin rope.

Just as he observed that fact the boat began to drift slowly backward, and as it did so the skeletons slowly sank down into the water until they disappeared altogether.

"They're gone," said Billy.

"It's time for us to go, too," replied Dick, with a shiver.

"What do you think caused them to come up?" asked Billy, now recovering from the shock of the apparitions, and trying to account for the phenomenon.

"Don't ask me. Let's get away as quick as we can."

He turned to grab his oars and then saw that one of them had got away and was out of his reach.

It was floating over toward one side of the watery passage, where it was caught by a gentle eddy that began to carry it slowly toward the hole in the rocky wall.

"There goes my oar. Can't you grab it, Billy?"

"I can't reach it. Paddle the boat over a bit," answered Billy.

Dick worked the boat over as well as he could with the other oar.

In doing this he sent the craft forward in a diagonal direction.

As Billy reached for the truant oar the boat again hit something under the water, and as it did so up popped the two skeletons again with a swish.

Dick heard the noise, and turning around, gave a yell of renewed fright.

Billy had just seized the oar as the skeletons reappeared and he looked at them attentively.

The thought flashed through his mind that some natural means had caused them to rise, and he wondered what the agency was.

He shoved the oar blade toward the nearest bony object.

It struck the skeleton on the breastbone and caused it to bend back, pulling its companion with it.

At the same time the boat moved back and the skeletons disappeared again.

Billy began to laugh.

"What are you laughing at?" said Dick, astonished at his chum's nerve.

"Those skeletons."

"I don't see anything funny about them. Let's get away."

"Hold on. I want to find out if I can what makes them come up out of the water," said Billy.

"You're crazy!"

"And you're rattled."

"Those skeletons were enough to rattle anybody."

"Ho! They are only skeletons and can't hurt anybody."

"I'm going to get away. This place is haunted."

"Haunted, your grandmother! Something caused those things to jump out of the water, and I'm going to find out what did it," insisted Billy.

"Don't monkey with them or something will happen to us."

"Both times they came up the boat ran against something. It wasn't an unyielding obstruction, like a rock, but something that shifted with the boat. Here's your oar. Row toward that hole again."

Instead of obeying his companion's request, Dick, as soon as he replaced the oar in the oarlock, began to back-water as hard as he could go, and the boat began to return, stern foremost, the way they came.

"I didn't think you were such a afraid-cap," said Billy, disgusted with his chum's timidity. "Let me have the oars."

"Not on your life, I won't," said Dick, who had enough of the skeletons for one day, at any rate.

"You're as full of fancies as some old woman," growled Billy.

"I know enough not to butt in where I've no business to," returned Dick.

"It wouldn't do for you to go past a cemetery on a dark night all by yourself."

"I wouldn't do it."

"Nor through a lonesome wood. You'd see a ghost every five minutes."

"There are others."

"I know there are; but I'm not one of them. So you think this island is haunted, do you?" chuckled Billy.

"This creek is, at any rate."

"If it happened to be night instead of daytime I guess you'd have had a fit."

"If those skeletons had grabbed you and pulled you under the water with them you wouldn't feel so cocky," said Dick,

as the boat rounded the spur of rock and they came in sight of the reef and wreck once more.

"Didn't you notice that something stopped the boat and prevented us from getting any closer to those skeletons?" said Billy.

"It's a good thing something did. It was a warning for us to keep away."

"You make me tired."

"Do I? Well, I feel sorry for you."

"If I were you I'd feel sorry for myself. You want to cultivate your nerve if you expect to get along in this world. If you're going to get upset every time you run against something unusual you'd better hire a nurse to look after you."

"Are you looking for a scrap?" asked Dick, angrily.

"No."

"Then quit digging at me. Where shall we land?"

"There's another creek yonder. Pull into that if you aren't afraid of meeting with more skeletons."

Dick guided the boat's head into the little stream, and began to pull slowly and with evident caution.

It was clear that he was still nervous, and half anticipated the appearance of other uncanny objects.

Nothing barred their progress as they proceeded, and soon they opened up a luxuriant tropical prospect beyond the rocky barriers that surrounded that end of the island.

The ground on either side of the creek was thick with vegetation, and out of it rose lofty palms and cocoanut trees, while they could see groves of banana and breadfruit in the near distance, as well as other tropical plants.

After going up the creek a little way Billy noticed a cavernous opening in the hillside to one side, and he called Dick's attention to it.

"Let's stop here and go and look at it. It may be just the place for us to make a headquarters of."

Dick was willing to investigate the place, so they made the boat fast to the first palm tree they came to and landed.

It was only a short walk to the cave and they soon reached it.

"This would be a snug place in a storm," said Billy.

"You bet it would," agreed Dick. "I wonder how far back it goes into the hill?"

"We'll have to investigate that later with a lantern," replied Billy, as they paused before an inner opening beyond which all looked dark as night.

They did not deem it wise to proceed any further in that direction.

The place was full of nooks and alcoves that offered good storage spots for their supply of provisions, so they decided to take possession of the cave.

In one of these nooks they discovered a small stream of fresh water trickling down the face of the rock and falling into a little pool.

This solved the most important problem of the hour, and they were delighted.

"We can live like kings here," said Dick. "A fellow doesn't have to work here for his daily bread. He can do nothing all day long and still subsist on the fat of the land. I tell you there are much worse places on the face of the globe than a tropical island in the middle of the South Pacific."

It took the boys half an hour to unload their boat and

remove the stuff to the cave, after which they rowed back to the wreck for more.

As there was no saying how long the Susan Scudder would hold together, especially if another gale sprang up, it was advisable to get everything out of her that they could make use of as soon as possible.

The sky was now clearing fast and the sun was shining with tropical warmth.

The wind had dropped to a fair breeze, but the ocean outside of the reef was yet agitated to a considerable degree.

On reaching the wreck they loaded the boat up again, this time taking several tools from the carpenter's chest, and not forgetting the lantern which hung in the galley and the compass which they took from the binnacle.

Before starting for the island again they took their dinner aboard.

"I wonder how Davy Jones is getting on in the fok's'l?" grinned Billy. "He must know that the bark is ashore. Last night's crash and the absence of motion have told him that. He probably thinks that everybody but himself is lost, and I have no doubt he has been making some desperate attempts to get out of his prison."

"I wish he had turned up his toes instead of Mr. Jordan and the men. I sha'n't feel quite easy after we let him out to know that he's sneaking around at liberty, probably scheming to do us up somehow. A fellow that has the heart to poison a whole ship's company is a mighty dangerous companion to have around."

"You bet your life he is," nodded Billy. "If there was any certainty that the bark wouldn't go to pieces I'd vote to keep him a prisoner in the fok's'l right along, giving him a week's rations at a time to live on."

"That won't do, for the bark is likely to break up at the next blow," said Dick. "Besides, the fok's'l will need airing out. He'd smother in there from the foul air."

"We needn't let him out till to-morrow," said Billy. "He can stand it that long. In fact, I guess he can stand it better than most men."

When they finished their dinner they made their second trip to the island, and carried the stuff to the cave.

After a short rest they returned to the wreck again.

On their third trip to the shore they carried two mattresses and some bedding as well as a lot of miscellaneous things they found in the staterooms not flooded by the water.

By that time the only sign left of the late storm was the huge ocean swells.

They made one more trip to the Susan Scudder that day and brought away a lot of pans, kettles, and other cooking utensils.

The noise they made was heard by the prisoner in the fore-castle, and he started up a pounding on the scuttle to attract their notice.

They heard him easily enough, but paid no attention to him.

As evening fell Billy made a small fire in a hole outside of the cave and cooked a pot of coffee.

While he was thus employed Dick went to the banana grove and brought an armful of the ripe fruit, together with some samples of yams.

The latter, when roasted or boiled, forms a palatable, nutritious and wholesome food.

"Let's light both the lanterns and explore the back of the cave as far as we can go," suggested Billy. "We can do it as well at night as we can by day."

"I'm with you," answered Dick, with alacrity.

The lanterns were lighted and they started for the rear of the cave.

The hole they had noticed before led into a winding passage along which they proceeded for perhaps a hundred feet, when they saw another opening before them.

Billy was leading the way, holding his lantern above his head.

He was within a yard of the hole when his foot was caught and held by something like a wire stretched across the passage, and he fell on his hands and knees.

As he struggled to extricate his leg, a grinning skeleton, similar to those the boys had encountered in the first creek, appeared in the opening, dancing and gesticulating in a weird and grotesque fashion.

Dick gave it one look, uttered a yell of terror, and dropping the lantern fled back through the passage, leaving Billy to face the horrible object alone.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH THE TABLES ARE TURNED ON BILLY AND DICK.

Of course Billy saw the skeleton as soon as Dick did.

If he hadn't his companion's yell of fright would certainly have directed his attention to it.

The light from his lantern flashed dimly on the gruesome figure and rather added to its weirdness.

Billy might have been badly shocked had he not already seen a pair of those uncanny objects before that day in the daylight, and was satisfied there was nothing supernatural about them.

This one looked as like the other two as three peas in a pod.

It was a little more active, that's all, swinging its legs and arms about as if operated by strings like a marionette.

Billy stopped kicking his caught leg and looked at the gyrating skeleton.

Almost immediately the fleshless figure stopped its motions and came to a rest.

The boy backed away a little and put his hand down to his ankle to see what had hold of it, but not taking his eyes off the apparition.

The moment he moved it renewed its motions.

He proceeded to experiment a little more with results that satisfied him that whatever was entangled in his foot controlled the movements of the skeleton.

The idea seemed so amusing to him that he laughed out aloud.

He flashed the light on his ankle and found that it was caught between two wires that ran across the passage and then up either side of the walls.

He easily released his foot, and then turned to look at the skeleton.

It had disappeared.

Billy picked up Dick's lantern and began to ponder upon the skeleton phenomena.

Clearly the skeletons had been placed in the creek and at this opening to scare any one away who happened to come in either direction.

The mechanical ingenuity displayed in the apparatus for making them appear and disappear as if of their own volition indicated that the originators of the scheme had an important object in the background.

Billy wondered what that object was.

He decided that it was well worth investigating.

Stepping carefully over the wires he knelt down, grabbed them and pulled.

As the wires yielded the skeleton popped into sight again.

It stood still until Billy jerked the wires about, then it began its fantastic dance on nothing.

When he released the wires the skeleton vanished.

Billy chuckled to think how his chum had been scared out of his shoes.

"I must go back and explain matters to him. Perhaps he thinks by this time that the spooks have carried me off with them. Dick is all right except when he gets up against what he imagines is the supernatural, and then he goes to pieces. That's one of the disadvantages of constant association with sailors. They are simply soaked with superstition."

Billy returned to the cave with both lanterns, but Dick wasn't there.

The cabin boy went to the entrance and looked around outside.

"Hello, Dick!" he shouted.

"Hello yourself!" came back a voice close at hand, and Dick came out from behind the shelter of a clump of tropical bushes.

"You're a nice chum, you are, to skip out and let a fellow fight it out alone in the dark with a grinning skeleton. What have you to say for yourself?" said Billy, sarcastically.

"Couldn't help it to save my life," replied Dick, sheepishly. "How did you make out?"

"Come back with me and I'll show you."

"What do you want to show me?" asked Dick, holding back.

"I want to show you how that skeleton works."

"No, thanks, not to-night."

"It works by wires."

"Go on! You're joking."

"No, I'm not. It's a fact I'm telling you. The whole thing is a contrivance to frighten any one approaching the far hole in the passage."

"What for?"

"That's what puzzles me, but we'll find it out if we remain long on this island."

Billy couldn't induce Dick to re-enter the passage again that night, notwithstanding his positive assurance that the skeleton was a mere mechanical freak.

As the boys were tired after their day's exertions, as well as the strenuous experience of the storm and wreck, they turned in on their mattresses and slept like tops till morning.

After breakfast they revisited the wreck.

The water in the cabin had disappeared, much to their surprise, until they found that a hole had been punctured through the side of the bark into one of the staterooms.

The stateroom next to it was still half full of water which had not been able to escape.

They opened the trap of the lazarette and discovered all the stores tumbled to port and pretty wet.

They got out enough to load their boat and carried it ashore to the cave.

On their return to the wreck Billy reluctantly approached the battened cover of the forecabin hatch and proceeded to open it.

When he threw back the hatch cover the smell that saluted his nostrils was not the sweetest in the world.

"Are you down there, Davy Jones?" he shouted.

No answer came back, though he shouted several times.

"If the rascal is dead the responsibility of his death will rest on us," said Billy to Dick. "Much as I wish him out of the way I don't want to be the cause of his taking off."

Dick shouted down several times, but with no better success.

"I wouldn't go down into that hole for a hundred dollars," he said. "It is simply rank. I'm afraid we let him stay there too long."

"I won't believe he's dead till I see his corpse," replied Billy.

"Maybe he's only insensible and will revive when he gets a whiff of the fresh air," said Dick.

The boys decided to enter the forecabin later on if Jones failed to come up, and in the meantime they busied themselves removing various damp stores from the lazarette to the deck where the sun would dry them.

Billy then entered the stateroom that had belonged to Captain Cogswell, late skipper of the Susan Scudder, while Dick began rummaging the lockers of the chief mate's berth.

Each found, among other things, a heavy Colt's revolver with plenty of cartridges.

They welcomed the discovery with much satisfaction, since they expected to have to cope with Jones, for neither believed the scoundrel was dead.

There was a safe in the captain's room which probably contained money and many valuable papers, but it was not possible for Billy to open it.

After exhibiting their finds the boys returned to the deck.

They loaded the boat with part of a barrel of sugar and another of flour, which they removed from the pantry, and a number of other stores, and then they repaired to the forecabin.

The worst of the stench had found its way out by this time, and so the two boys walked down the ladder, expecting to see Jones stretched out somewhere on the floor or in one of the bunks.

To their surprise he was not there at all.

"He must have got out while we were busy in the staterooms," said Billy.

"If he did it's a wonder he didn't skip off in the boat with the stores we left drying in the sun," answered Dick.

They looked around carefully, but could discover no outlet from the place except through the small hatch opening, so they decided that Jones had come out while they were in the cabin, and for reasons of his own, which did not seem clear to the boys, was hiding somewhere about the vessel.

"He's a foxy rooster," said Dick. "He doesn't seem able to do anything that is straight and aboveboard. Why should he want to hide under present circumstances?"

"Ask me something easy, Dick. I defy any one to solve the motives of that rascal," replied Billy.

They were standing at the foot of the ladder ready to ascend to the fore-castle deck when he spoke the words.

Suddenly the sunshine streaming through the hatchway was cut off.

The boys glanced up to ascertain the cause of it, and saw the ugly, grinning face of Davy Jones gazing triumphantly down at them.

"So you thought you'd keep me down there till you got good and ready to let me out, eh?" he snarled. "You kept me there all day yesterday, and all last night, and part of this mornin', while you two were enj'yin' the fresh air and fillin' your stomachs with whatever you could lay your hands on. If you'd done the right thing by me you might have come into a keg of that gold I told you about. We wouldn't need no boat now to go in search of it, for this here island is Skeleton Island, the very island I wanted to reach. Now, instead of gettin' a share of the gold you'll stay right down in that there fok's'l where you kept me ag'in my will till you rot. I'm goin' to batten this hatch down on you the way it was battened down on me, and then you can be starved and be hanged to you both."

With those words, and with a hoarse, wicked laugh, he slapped the hatch cover on, pulled the canvas over it, and dragged a heavy anchor chain on top of the whole.

He kept on piling the chain on top of the hatch until the cover could not have been lifted by half a dozen able-bodied men underneath, then he left the spot, got into the loaded boat and rowed himself ashore.

CHAPTER XI.

BILLY AND DICK ESCAPE FROM THE TRAP SPRUNG UPON THEM BY DAVY JONES.

"We're in a fix for fair now!" ejaculated Billy, after making a rush up the ladder, only to find the cover slammed down in his face, and to hear the heavy links of the anchor chain piled upon the top of the hatch.

"What fools we were to come down here. In fact, we ought not to have opened the hatch at all, but left that villain to rot here himself. Now he's turned the tables on us with the deliberate intention of wiping us off the earth. Why the dickens didn't you shoot him while he was jawing at us?" cried the disgusted Dick.

"What's the use of howling over spilled milk?" returned Billy. "We've got to try and get out of here."

"How are we going to do it?"

"I couldn't tell you how. We must find a way."

"We can't push the hatch up because he's piled a heavy chain on it, and that's the only way out."

Billy struck a match, and seeing the lantern still hanging from the roof he took it down and lighted it.

Then he examined the bulkhead that cut off the fore-castle from the hold.

He found that Davy Jones had loosened the boards again that the mate had nailed up, thereby reopening the way to the hold.

Taking the lantern on his arm Billy crawled through on top of the cargo, calling Dick to follow him.

"Where are you going?" Dick wanted to know.

"On a voyage of discovery," returned Billy.

"What do you expect to discover?"

"A way out of our trouble, if I can find one."

"You won't find it through the hold."

"We're not likely to find it any other way."

Billy crawled ahead, not over enthusiastic as to the prospect of finding a way out, but hoping that they might.

It was stifling hot in that confined space, with the tropical sun beating down on the deck above.

The boys were soon covered with perspiration, and dirt as well.

They had gone about half the length of the bark when Billy saw a gleam of sunshine on his left side.

He made his way toward it and then beheld a gaping fissure in the starboard side of the vessel where her planks had been smashed by the rocks.

It was more than large enough for a man to crawl through.

In a few minutes more Billy was crawling through the hole with his chum at his heels.

He let himself down on the rocks, and then, seeing a rope hanging over the vessel's side, he clambered up it hand-over-hand and was presently standing on the deck once more.

"Gee! But that was a lucky escape!" he breathed.

He looked forward at the fore-castle hatch and saw the weight that held down the cover.

"The blamed rascal wanted to make sure that we couldn't get out," he said to his chum; "but he forgot that there are more ways than one of skinning a cat."

"As the fellow has taken the boat we'll have to build a small raft to get to the island on," said Dick.

"There is plenty of material to build one with, and tools in the carpenter's chest to do the work with, so we might as well begin at once."

"All right, let's get busy," said Dick.

Billy brought a hammer, axe, saw and a small bag of spikes from the carpenter's room, while Dick was picking out a couple of heavy pieces of the wreckage, which lay alongside the bark, as a suitable foundation for the raft.

It did not take them long to spike three of the stateroom doors to two sections of a broken spar, and this of itself would easily bear their weight across the half-mile of smooth water that lay between the reef and the island.

They found a couple of oars among the mass of wreckage, and they were just what was needed to propel the raft along.

While the boys were resting in the shade of the cabin after their labor Billy recalled the words of Davy Jones just before he shut them in the fore-castle, and which had made little impression on either at the time owing to the strenuous situation in which they had found themselves placed at the moment.

Jones had said, in taunting tones, that the island close to which the Susan Scudder had been wrecked was Skeleton Island, the place where the seven kegs of gold were hidden in a marine cavern.

The moment the derelict's words flashed across Billy's mind he sprang up with a whoop that almost made Dick think his companion had suddenly gone crazy from sun-stroke or something else.

"What in thunder is the matter with you?" he growled.

"A whole lot is the matter with me," replied Billy, looking like a person who had just received some wonderful intelligence.

"You act like it. One would think you had sat down on

the business end of a tack, or that some insect had stung you in a tender spot."

"I've just tumbled to the cause of those skeletons being where we saw them."

"Have you? Let's hear."

"They were placed there to guard the seven kegs of gold Davy Jones told us were secreted in a marine cavern on what he called Skeleton Island. Didn't you hear him say, just before he clapped the hatch cover on us, that this was Skeleton Island, and that if we'd done the fair thing by him according to his idea we might have got one of those kegs of gold?"

"That's so. He did say that," replied Dick, beginning to show considerable interest in the subject.

"When he sent for us that night and told us the yarn about the island and the seven kegs of gold, we thought he was giving us a pretty tall story, and we didn't take any stock in it."

"That's right," nodded Dick.

"Now that we've seen those skeletons, apparently guarding two entrances leading to some place inside that rocky barrier, the story of the treasure told by Jones doesn't look quite so fishy as it did. No one would have taken the trouble to put those skeletons where they are, and arranged a mechanical contrivance to make them act in such a weird, life-like manner, unless there was an object of some importance to be gained by it. The object was to frighten any person who chanced that way, and keep him from going any further in those directions. Why should such a device be necessary if not to prevent the accidental discovery of something hidden in the depths of the rock? What is hidden there? According to Jones, who seems to know, there are seven kegs of gold stowed away in a marine cavern. It strikes me, after what we have seen, that Jones was not talking through his hat, but telling a positive fact. What do you think about it?"

"I think just as you do," replied Dick.

"You are willing, then, to help me investigate that passage at the back of our cave and see if it leads to a marine cavern?"

"Yes, I'm with you," replied Dick, eagerly, for the thought of finding seven kegs of gold was a powerful stimulant to such an undertaking, skeletons or no skeletons.

"We'll have to proceed cautiously—not on account of those skeletons, which really amount to nothing, but because we may expect to meet Davy Jones on the ground. The skeletons are not dangerous, but he is."

"We've got revolvers to defend ourselves with," said Dick. "What need we care for him?"

"But we don't want to kill him," replied Billy; "yet, as long as he is at liberty we can never consider ourselves safe from him. The moment he discovers that we have escaped from the fate he laid out for us he'll try to contrive some other means of putting us out of the way. He's such a treacherous scamp that we never can tell what he may be up to. One of us will always have to stand watch while the other is sleeping. It will be a question of always being on our guard while the three of us are on the island."

"What's the matter with laying for him and catching him unawares?" said Dick. "Then we can keep him a prisoner until a vessel comes this way and takes us off."

"We can do that, but even then he'll be a source of trouble to us. We'll have to watch and feed him."

"It is better to have him under our eyes than sneaking around in the dark looking for a chance to kill us."

Billy had to admit that, so it was decided to capture Jones and hold him a prisoner for their own safety and peace of mind.

It was now after one o'clock in the day, and as the boys were hungry they investigated the remaining stores in the lazarette and found more than enough to satisfy their appetites for the time being.

While they were eating they also came to the conclusion not to leave the bark till after dark for fear that their enemy might see them propelling their rude craft across the water toward the island, and, by lying in wait for them at some point, succeed in doing one or both of them a mischief before they could defend themselves.

They watched the island off and on all the afternoon, but saw no signs of the derelict, and after making a meal off what was left on board the wreck they started for the shore as soon as the shades of night fell and hid their movements.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SEVEN KEGS.

It took the boys some time to propel their rude craft across to the island.

Then they worked it up the creek to the palm tree where they had been accustomed to tie their boat, and made it fast.

"Jones didn't come up this creek in the boat as far as I can see," said Billy. "I guess he must have landed somewhere on the beach."

"I hope he didn't find the cave and all that stock of provisions we have stored there," said Dick.

"It is hard to say what he has done during the hours he has been on this island. If he did discover the cave and the stuff we brought from the wreck, he would probably make himself at home there, so we had better be cautious in going there," said Billy.

Accordingly, they drew near the cave with some care, keeping the thick vegetation between them and the entrance as much as possible.

When they reached the last bit of shrubbery Billy told Dick to wait while he went forward alone and looked into the cave.

He crawled up to it on his hands and knees, and then wormed himself inside like a shadow, listening intently as he proceeded for some suspicious sound that would indicate the presence of the derelict.

He heard nothing.

The cave was as dark and silent as a tomb.

When he reached the alcove where they had stored the stuff from the wreck he ventured to strike a match.

Everything was exactly as they had left it that morning.

Satisfied that Jones had not been at the cave he returned to where Dick was waiting and reported all things serene.

They concluded, however, not to sleep in the cave that night, for fear that the rascally cook might be prowling around in the vicinity.

They brought their mattresses down to the raft, poled the craft further up the stream to where there was a profusion

of shrubbery, and anchoring her lay down and were soon asleep under the starlit sky.

The rising sun shining in their faces awoke them.

They poled the raft back to the palm tree again and marched up to the cave to get their breakfast.

"We'll cut out the coffee this morning," said Billy, "for fear the smoke of a fire might attract the attention of Jones. If we are going to catch him off his guard and make him a prisoner he mustn't discover that we have escaped from the wreck."

Dick agreed with his chum, so they made their breakfast off canned meat, bananas and pure water.

"What's the programme for to-day?" asked Dick.

"I suggest that we hunt for that marine cavern where the seven kegs of gold are supposed to be," was his friend's answer.

"All right," agreed Dick.

They lighted the two lanterns, and each taking one, they entered the passage at the back of the cave and proceeded to follow its windings till they drew near the opening where the skeleton had appeared the night before.

Billy flashed the light along the ground till he saw the wires, when he called a halt.

"Now, Dick, I'm going to demonstrate to you how this skeleton that's on the other side of that hole is worked. You don't see it now, do you?"

"No," replied Dick.

"Kneel down here and grasp those wires. Now look at the hole and pull them toward you."

Dick did as directed while Billy held his lantern so the light would shine directly on the opening.

The moment Dick pulled the wires the skeleton popped into view, and stood grinning at them with its fleshless face.

In spite of the fact that Dick knew now that he was not looking at a spook, he felt rather creepy, for the thing looked awfully suggestive.

"Pulling the wires, you see, brought it into view," said Billy. "Pushing them in the opposite direction would have produced the same result. Now, jerk the wires about and the skeleton will dance and throw its limbs about."

Dick shook the wires and what Billy had said came to pass.

"Now let go the wires."

The young sailor did so and the skeleton vanished.

"There, you've had a practical demonstration of the skeleton business," said Billy. "Now we'll go on and see what is on the other side of that hole."

"How do you suppose the two skeletons in the inlet were worked?" asked Dick.

"On the same principle," replied Billy. "There's one or more wires stretched across the inlet just below low tide. When our boat struck them they bent forward, that caused some kind of a framework, to which the skeletons are attached, to rise. When the boat receded, and the wire became taut again, the skeletons sank beneath the surface of their own weight. I'm almost willing to swear that is the way the thing is done, although, as you know, I have not had a chance to examine into it. I have formed my opinion from the way this one is worked."

"I guess you are right," answered Dick, much enlightened. "You've got a great head, Billy."

"I am in the habit of using my eyes and my wits. Every effect has its cause. When I saw how those skeletons popped out of the water both times that the boat was sent up the stream, and how the boat was stopped each time by an invisible obstruction, I began figuring as to the cause of the phenomenon."

"It's a great scheme," said Dick.

"It is rather clever. Well, come on. If we meet with any more skeletons you'll know they all belong to the same family."

"I don't wonder now that Jones called this Skeleton Island. He must have been on the island before, or learned the facts from some one who had."

"He might have been one of the chaps who concealed the kegs of gold originally, and it isn't unlikely that he may have helped to put the skeletons into their present positions."

"Where do you suppose the gold came from?" asked Dick, as they passed through the hole.

"How the dickens should I know where it came from? Some vessel carrying the money may have been wrecked here years ago, and the kegs of coin were saved and secreted in the marine cavern by those of the crew who escaped."

"How about the skeletons? If they were once real men they wouldn't be apt to hold together in the way these do, would they?"

"Hold on a minute. Let's examine this dancing chap. Maybe we'll find an answer to your question."

Billy flashed the light on the skeleton which was dangling against the wall on the inside of the inner cave they had entered.

They were not experts on the subject of skeletons, but a close look at the figure gave Billy the idea that this was not a real one.

It was strung together with wires, had ball joints, and looked as if it had once been highly polished.

Billy grabbed one of its legs and then made the discovery that it was artistically fashioned out of a hard, white wood.

"Say, Dick, this is only a fake skeleton," he said.

"A fake one! What do you mean?"

"I mean this never was a human being at any stage of its career. It is made out of wood."

"Is it?" replied Dick, in some wonder.

"Feel this leg and you will see."

Dick felt of it and was satisfied his companion was right.

"The fellow was an artist who made that," he remarked.

"The others are made of the same material, too, I'll bet," said Billy.

"They must have been brought to this island," said Dick.

"Might have been part of the cargo of the vessel that carried the kegs of money, or of another vessel that went ashore here."

"Those things are used by medical chaps, aren't they?"

"Yes, and sometimes by stage magicians in some of their illusions. Also by anatomical museums."

The boys examined the arrangement of wires by which the skeleton was manipulated and pronounced the whole scheme a mighty clever one.

Then they crossed the cave to another passage which led downward.

They met with no more skeletons, the supply having apparently been exhausted.

At length they heard a peculiar breathing noise, like the expirations of some huge monster asleep.

"What's that?" asked Dick.

"Give it up," replied Billy, as they both stopped and listened.

"There's something alive down there," said Dick. "I guess we'd better not go any further."

The sound was certainly a mysterious and disquieting one to the two boys.

After listening to it for a few minutes Billy summoned up nerve enough to go on, but Dick held back.

"Come on," said the cabin boy. "What are you afraid of?"

"I wouldn't take the chances if I were you," replied his chum.

"It may be some other contrivance like the skeletons to frighten people off."

"It's too life-like for that," insisted Dick. "There might be a big devilfish down there. If he should get his tentacles on you it would be all up with you. He would suck you down under water and eat you up at his leisure."

"Did you ever hear that devilfish make a noise like that?" asked Billy.

"No, but it would be like them to do it."

"How do you know it would?"

"That's my idea."

"Well, I'm going to investigate. We'll never get hold of those kegs of gold if we're going to be scared off by noises and such things."

Thus speaking, Billy went on slowly and cautiously, flashing the light ahead of him along the inclined passage.

The further he went the louder became the sound.

Dick followed, very much against his will, with the lantern in one hand and his revolver in the other.

Finally Billy saw a dark blot ahead and made it out to be another opening.

The odd sound came right through it, as though the cause of it was on the other side.

The noise now seemed more like the subdued bellowing of a bull.

When he reached the opening at the end of this passage Billy paused.

Finally screwing up his courage he thrust the lantern through and looked with his head.

The light flashed into another cave, and a strong smell of brine saluted his nose.

Nothing happening to alarm him, he stepped down on a flooring of hard sand, and raised the lantern high above his head.

He saw he was in a low-roofed marine cavern, as dark as night.

The shelving floor was almost wholly covered with green sea water.

A long line of shells and seaweed marked the high-water point.

Billy could see the water rolling up nearly to the line and then receding a short distance.

It did this as regular as clockwork, and was accompanied by the bellowing sound.

Then the cabin boy knew what caused the sound—the sea ebbing and flowing through a great hole in the rocky wall.

The tide being nearly at its highest point, the hole was completely covered and the noise was caused by the compression of the air at the top of the opening.

Billy yelled to Dick to come on.

"It's the inrush of the water through some hole that we can't see that makes the sound we hear," he said to his companion.

Dick understood and his fears vanished at once.

Then, as he looked around the underground cave, he said:

"I'll bet this is the marine cavern where the seven kegs of gold are hidden."

"I'll bet it is, too," agreed Billy. "Let's look around."

There was not much space beyond the flow of water for them to move around in, and their lanterns threw out only a ghostly kind of light.

The roof and the sandy floor met a short distance away, so that they were obliged to do most of their investigations on their hands and knees.

Finally they reached the side of the cavern opposite that by which they had entered.

Here they were met by a spur of rock against which the water rippled.

Crawling around it they found themselves in a snug little pocket.

In the far corner, ranged in order, they saw seven small, solid-looking kegs.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNEXPECTED SURPRISE.

"There are the seven kegs of gold," cried Billy, in great delight.

He crawled forward and flashed the light upon them.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Dick, in a tone of intense satisfaction.

The kegs were not much larger than those used for the transportation of white lead, but they were big enough to contain a good many thousand dollars in gold coin.

"We're rich," said Billy.

"If we can carry those kegs away from the island we'll be well fixed," said Dick. "I don't believe we need work any more for the rest of our lives."

"They're heavy, all right," remarked the cabin boy, lifting one with difficulty.

"Gold is about as heavy as anything I know of," said Dick. "If the kegs are too weighty for us to carry we can roll them up to the cave. At any rate, we'll get them there somehow, bet your life."

"I know a better way, Dick."

"What is it?"

"We'll return to the cave above and rig up a kind of stretcher—a piece of canvas nailed to two pieces of wood. Then we'll make seven round trips to this place and remove the kegs one at a time. That's the easiest and best way."

"That's a good plan," admitted Dick. "We'd better return at once."

"Well, lead the way. By the time we get back the water may have receded from the opening and then the cavern will not be so dark as it is now."

"Hist! Billy," cried Dick. "There's a light coming this way."

"A light!" cried the cabin boy.

"Yes. That must be Jones after these kegs of gold. He mustn't see us if we can avoid it."

Billy crawled over to the corner of the spur of rock and looked back the way they had come.

Sure enough, there was a dark object crouching along with a torch in his hand.

There was no doubt about his identity as well as his purpose.

It was Davy Jones, and he was coming toward the spot where the kegs were hidden.

There was no chance of their quitting the pocket without Jones seeing them.

It looked as if they would have to face him and have it out there and then.

"We'll get as far into the pocket as we can and put out the lights," said the cabin boy. "Come on."

He led the way, and after passing the last keg discovered a nook in which it was possible by keeping close and quiet they might escape detection.

They blew out their lantern light and hugged close to the stony wall.

In a short time Davy Jones's ugly countenance came into view, lighted up by the torch he carried.

He crawled over to the kegs and counted them, without exhibiting any feeling of elation at the discovery.

He acted as if he expected to find them just where they were.

Squatting upon his haunches he looked at the kegs for awhile as if figuring on their value.

Finally he got up and lifted one a few inches from the sand.

It was clearly a big load for him to carry.

Dropping the keg he weighted each of the others in turn.

Then, after a last look at them, he crawled out of the pocket, and the boys, leaving their post of concealment, saw him slouching across the cavern the way he had come.

They also noticed that the bellowing noise had ceased, and that a gleam of daylight came from the front of the cave, on a level with the water.

"The tide is going down," said Billy. "The entrance to this place from the outside will soon be open. I'll bet it's the hole we were rowing toward yesterday when we ran foul of those skeletons. If we had the boat in our possession the job of getting these kegs away would be much simpler. All we'd have to do would be to row the boat in through the hole at low water, after tearing the wire obstruction away so we could pass the place where the skeletons are. Then we could probably carry the seven kegs away at one trip."

"I'll bet that's what Jones intends doing," said Dick.

"Then I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll try and set a watch on his movements. It would be a good scheme to let him do all the heavy work—that is, row the boat in here, load the kegs into it, and when he rows out again we could follow him, hold him up with our revolvers, make him our prisoner and take possession of the kegs. Then we could hide the boat with the kegs aboard somewhere until a vessel showed up, when we'd row off to her, and leave Jones to shift for himself on the island."

"That will be just the thing," agreed Dick.

"Then let's get out of here."

Billy struck a match and lighted both lanterns, after

which they left the pocket and made their way over to the mouth of the passage.

They found no trouble in getting back to the cave.

They entered the place cautiously lest Jones might be hanging around, but found that he wasn't.

A glance at their stores showed that he had not touched them if he had seen them, which was doubtful, as the alcove was quite deep and dark.

They blew out the lanterns and placed them aside, after which they left the cave to get a line on Jones's present whereabouts.

They went to the creek first to see if there was any sign of the cook and the rowboat there.

Neither was in sight.

"We'll cut across the island to the shore," said Billy. "I've an idea that we will run across him somewhere in that direction."

When they reached the shore they scanned the rocks and low cliff in one direction and the long curving beach in the other, but there wasn't any indication that Jones and his boat were around there.

"Maybe he's rowed around to the inlet so as to be on hand as soon as the tide is low enough for him to get into the cavern," said Dick.

"It will take two or three hours for the tide to go down low enough for him to get in there," replied Billy. "However, we can make our way over the rocks and see if he's in the inlet."

They were about to start when suddenly a shrill scream awoke the echoes of that part of the island.

"Good gracious!" cried Dick, grabbing his chum by the arm. "What was that?"

"Sounded like the cry of a girl," said the cabin boy.

"A girl! Then the island is inhabited."

Again came the scream, louder if anything than before, and nearer.

"Somebody's in trouble," said Billy. "We must go to their assistance."

He pulled out his revolver and started in the direction of the sound.

Dick got out his weapon and followed him.

They had gone but a few yards when they heard a rustling in the shrubbery.

At that moment Dick's foot caught in a creeping vine and he pitched headlong to the ground.

Billy pressed ahead without noticing his chum's predicament.

The sound in the bushes grew louder, and as Billy reached an open space a panting, frightened-eyed, brown-haired girl dashed out from the shelter of the shrubbery and tried to reach a grove of plantain trees beyond.

Her strength and wind seemed to be giving out, and tripping over something in her path she sank with another cry to the ground.

At that moment Davy Jones dashed out of the shrubbery, and with a howl of exultation rushed up to the girl and seized her roughly by the arm.

She uttered another shrill scream and shrank away from him.

Billy thought it was time to interfere.

He sprang forward just as the cook drew a knife to intimidate the girl.

"Let that girl alone, Davy Jones, and drop that knife or I'll drop you!" he cried in a tone that showed he meant business.

Jones looked around in a startled way, and gave a gasp of surprise and rage when he recognized the cabin boy.

CHAPTER XIV.

DORA VANE AND HER FATHER, THE CAPTAIN.

Jones uttered a snarl of fury, and, releasing the girl, turned to face Billy.

He found a cocked revolver pointed at his head.

The girl, recognizing the boy as a friend, sprang to her feet and ran toward him crying, "Save me! Save me!"

"Sure, I'll save you, miss," said Billy. "Now, then, Jones, are you going to drop that knife, or do you want me to put a ball into you?"

The rascal, seeing he had no show of getting at the boy, began to back away.

"Stop!" roared Billy, "or I'll shoot."

The villainous cook stopped, for there was a ring in the boy's voice that told him it was dangerous to disobey the command.

"Now, drop that knife or I'll shoot it out of your hand."

Jones flung the knife down in a sullen way, for he saw Dick coming to reinforce his friend with a revolver in his hand.

"Take charge of him, Dick," said Billy, as soon as he saw his companion at hand. "Now, miss," he said, turning to the agitated girl, "who are you, and where do you come from?"

"I come from the other end of the island," she answered.

"My name is Dora Vane. And you?" she added, eagerly.

"My name is Billy Black, miss. My companion, myself and that rascal are the sole survivors from the bark Susan Scudder, which went on the reef in the storm night before last. I suppose you are one of the inhabitants of this island. Are there many people living here?"

"Only my father and myself. Our brig, the Merry Andrew, was driven ashore here five months ago in a terrible gale. Everybody was lost but father and I. We've been living here ever since, watching for a sail that never came near enough for us to signal. When I saw that man," pointing at Jones, "first standing near a boat on the shore, I thought he was from a vessel anchored perhaps off the reef, and I ran towards him to tell him that father and I wanted to be taken off the island. But the moment he saw me he ran at me in such a way that he frightened me, and I turned and tried to get away from him. He nearly caught me twice, and I screamed for help, though I did not know where it would come from, for my father is at the other end of the island, half a mile away. Only for you I know not what this man would have done to me. He has a bad face, and I am sure he is a wicked man."

"You're right. He's about as bad as they come, and I guess it's lucky for you that Dick and I happened to be around in time to save you from him."

"I am very grateful to you for rescuing me from him," Dora said, earnestly. "You and your friend will, of course, come with me to the other end of the island and let me introduce you to my father."

"We'll do that, all right; but we must attend to this chap first."

"What will you do with him?"

"Tie him to one of these trees for the present. How far down the shore is the rowboat where you met this man?"

"Only a short distance," replied the girl.

"There ought to be some rope in her forward locker. We'll go there. Come, now, Jones, get a move on! If you try to get away I'll shoot you."

Jones, much against his will, walked on ahead, with the boys watching his every move to guard against any sudden break for liberty on his part.

Miss Vane kept close to Billy, whom she regarded as her preserver.

When they reached the boat, Billy found all the rope he wanted, and he and Dick bound Jones securely to a palm tree.

"I guess it will be just as easy to go to where your father is by boat as not," said Billy.

"You'll have to row there in the sun," said Dora, "and I shouldn't think you'd like that."

"Oh, we don't mind a little thing like that," replied Billy. "By the way, what are you living on—you and your father? Did you save anything from the wreck of your vessel?"

"We saved nothing from the brig except what washed ashore after the gale, and that wasn't much," she answered.

"We have been living on fruit and raw shellfish."

"What! For five months?"

"Yes."

"It's about time you had a change of diet."

"It would be very acceptable if we could get it."

"Well, we saved a considerable part of our vessel's stores. We've got the stuff stowed away in a cave at this end of the island. We have various kinds of canned meats, vegetables and fruits, several bags of potatoes, onions, etc. A case of soda crackers, another of hardtack. Also plenty of tea, coffee, cocoa, and two dozen cans of condensed cream. We had half a barrel of sugar, and another of flour, but this rascal here ran off with them and a bunch of other stuff. I s'pose he's got them somewhere around here. However, that doesn't make any difference, for there are two barrels of flour and one of sugar in the lazarette of the bark yet, and they can be easily got at, for she lies high and in good shape on the reef off yonder."

"My gracious! What a lot of things you have got!" cried the girl. "You won't mind letting us have a little, will you?"

"You shall have all you want. What sort of place are you living in?"

"A small hut that father built. This is the third one he made. The other two were destroyed by violent gales."

"Well, what's the matter with you and your father taking up your abode in our cave?"

"Where is your cave?"

"In yonder line of rocks."

"Father didn't care to come over to this end of the island on account of the reef which keeps vessels away. When vessels approach this island at all it would be at the other end where there is no reef."

"They don't seem to come this way often if you have been here five months without chance of rescue."

The girl said that it seemed that way.

"You and your father had better come over to this end," said Billy. "You will have a solid roof over your heads and a mattress to sleep on. Besides, you'll live on the fat of the land as long as the stores hold out. Dick and I will make it a point to go to the other end of the island every day to see if there's a sail in sight. That ought to fill the bill. Don't you think your father will agree to that arrangement?"

"I think he will," she replied. "He will be very grateful to you for your offer, I am sure."

Billy concluded that it would be better to walk to the other end of the island than row in the hot sun, and so with Dora Vane for their guide they started off.

After a walk of about half a mile they reached the hut where the ship master and his daughter were living.

Dora introduced the boys to her father, who was surprised to know that there were others on the island besides themselves.

Billy renewed his proposal to Captain Vane, telling him about the stores they had at the cave, and he agreed to transfer his place of abode to the other end of the island.

As it was dinner time, the prospect of getting a decent kind of a meal induced the captain and his daughter to make an immediate start.

When the party reached the cave no time was lost by the boys, assisted by Dora, in setting out a meal that made the mouths of the two castaways of the *Merry Andrew* water.

After dinner the boys went to the place where they had left Jones bound and releasing his hands handed him some canned meat and crackers to satisfy his appetite.

The rascal tried to bargain for his freedom, promising the boys one of the seven kegs of gold which he told them he had seen since he came to the island.

The boys refused to treat with him on any terms, and when he found that he could not work them to his liking he said many things to them that would not look well in print.

They rebound him to the tree and left him to amuse himself as best he could.

They discovered the stores he had carried off in the boat in a banana grove.

Returning them to the little craft they rowed her around to the creek, where they carried the goods to the cave.

Next morning they took Dora down through the passages and inner caves to show her the marine cavern.

That afternoon, about one o'clock, when they carried some rations to Davy Jones, they found that the rascal had managed in some way to free himself and was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER A WEEK.

"We'll have to keep our eyes skinned after this to guard against that villain playing a march on us," said Dick.

"That's right. It's too bad that there's a back entrance to the cave from the sea cavern below. He'll be able to sneak up on us that way. The captain must be told to be always on the watch when we are away. We ought to try and hide the boat from him," said Billy.

"We ought to, if he hasn't got away with it already."

"We'll go over to the creek now and see whether it is still where we left it. If it is we'll look up a securer place for it. If it isn't we'll know that he has taken possession of it. In any case I think we'd better make that stretcher and bring those kegs up to the cave where they'll be under our eyes."

They hastened over to the creek and, much to their satisfaction, found the boat where they had left it tied.

"If we leave it here he's bound to find it," said Billy. "We must hide it some place where he's not likely to stumble upon it."

"I think the safest place for it is the marine cavern," replied Dick. "We can take it in there when the entrance is uncovered, and hide it in the darkest corner."

"Your idea isn't a bad one," replied Billy; "but, you see, we might need the boat some time when the tide was up, and we couldn't get it out of the cavern."

"Then fill it with water and let it sink here in the creek. You, I and the captain could raise it any time we wanted to, while it is very doubtful if Jones could do the trick single-handed."

"That will be the best plan, I guess," said Billy, after a moment's thought. "Are we going out to the wreck today?" asked Dick.

"I think we'll take Dora Vane out and show her over it."

"Then we might as well start at once. You go up to the cave and bring her. I'll wait here till you get back."

Billy returned to the cave and told Dora and her father that Davy Jones had made his escape, and that they would have to be on their guard against him.

Then he asked the girl if she wanted to go out to the wreck.

She replied that she would like to.

"Then come along. We're going right away. Here, Captain Vane, take my revolver. It will protect you against that rascal if he should attempt to molest you."

Billy and Dora walked down to the creek, got into the boat and Dick took the first spell at the oars.

They soon reached the wreck and took refuge from the sun in the cabin.

After half an hour's rest the boys began loading the boat with more stuff from the lazarette.

What they particularly wished to get was more sugar and flour.

They couldn't lift the barrels from the hold, so they broke a barrel of each open.

They found that the contents were slightly damaged by sea water.

They filled several empty boxes with flour and sugar and placed them in the boat, and they also carried away many useful articles from the carpenter's chest, including a small keg of nails.

The last things they put in the boat were a coil of thin line, some canvas sailcloth, and a can of kerosene oil to replenish the lanterns.

Then they shoved off and rowed back to the creek.

After landing their cargo they sunk the boat in the creek and carried the oars with the other things to the cave.

That night when they went to rest they left a lighted lantern in the main cave and Billy, Dick and Captain Vane arranged to stand a three-hour watch in turn, from eight till sunrise, about five.

After breakfast the two boys, with Dora, visited the opposite end of the island and remained there a couple of hours without seeing a sail.

They saw no signs of the rascally cook, and the boys couldn't help wondering what the fellow was doing.

As soon as they got back Billy took Dick aside and told him he had a plan for blocking up the rear way to the cave.

"First, we'll remove those seven kegs from the pocket to the lower passage," he said. "Then we'll take one of those doors that we used as a flooring for the raft, and brace it against the opening into the marine cavern. If Jones should get into the cavern some way he'll never be able to force the door after we have fixed it in good shape. The money kegs will also be out of his reach. We can then fetch them up to the cave any time."

Dick thought Billy's plan a first-class one, and that afternoon they carried it out.

The door more than filled up the aperture, and to make things doubly sure they pressed a second door into service, one against the other, and braced them so that it would have taken half a dozen stout men with a heavy beam as a battering-ram to demolish the barrier from the other side.

"If Davy Jones can get over that he's welcome to the kegs of gold and our scalps into the bargain," said Billy, viewing the completed job with satisfaction.

On their way back to the cave Billy cut the wires running across the passage with his hatchet and put the dancing skeleton out of commission.

After that the interest of the entire party centered in the arrival of some craft at the island that would offer them a chance to get back to civilization.

A week passed away and nothing was heard from Jones.

Dora and the boys went to the other end of the island every day to look for a sail.

They never failed to keep a bright lookout for the cook of the Susan Scudder, as they did not want to have him come upon them unawares.

One morning, about ^{at} two o'clock, Dick Raymond was standing his watch.

The heat and silence of the night had made him drowsy, and he had all he could do to keep his eyes open.

Dick felt decidedly grouchy towards Davy Jones, who was the cause of his being obliged to lose a part of his night's rest.

Whenever he felt himself nodding he got up, went to the place where the cool water flowed down the rocks into the pool and bathed his face.

It was two o'clock, as we have said, and Dick was gazing out into the main cave in a stupid kind of way, with his eyes half open, when a shadow approached the spot where the lighted lantern stood.

The shadow was Davy Jones, who had crept into the cave bent on mischief.

He put out his hand, seized the lantern, and started to look about the place.

He carried a heavy stick with a knot at the end of it—quite a formidable weapon in the hands of a desperate rascal like him.

Dick saw the light move and opened his eyes with a start.

He thought at first that it was the captain who was moving around the cave with the lantern, before relieving him from duty.

Had he been alert and wide awake he would have recognized the sinister features of the cook in the fitful flashings of the light.

Jones disappeared into one of the alcoves on the opposite side, and finding nothing there came out and tried the next one, with like result.

The third, or upper one, on that side was where Dora Vane slept.

The cook glided in and saw the sleeping girl.

On this occasion he had no designs on her, and was about to slip out again when the flashing of the light across her eyes awoke her.

She saw the rascal's face, recognized him, and thinking he was after her she gave a terrified scream that awoke the echoes of the cave.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

Dora's scream not only pulled Dick together, but it awoke Billy and the captain.

Jones immediately dropped the lantern and darted for the entrance to the cave.

Dick, however, was in his way, and the two, meeting suddenly in the dark, went down in a heap on the floor, half stunned.

The cook was the first to recover.

He sprang up and tried to make his escape.

Billy saw his figure silhouetted against the opening and fired at him.

The rascal uttered a cry, indicating that he had been hit by the bullet, then by a strong effort staggered outside and disappeared.

Billy rushed to the entrance, but he couldn't make out in which direction the man had gone.

He was sorry that the scoundrel had managed to get away, but he was satisfied, from the cry Jones uttered, that he had winged him with the bullet.

After the excitement had quieted down Dick admitted, rather sheepishly, that he had not been as wide awake as he might have been.

Next morning Billy and Dick made an effort to find Davy Jones's hiding place, but were not successful.

Nothing more was seen or heard from him during the next three weeks, although a constant watch was kept up.

One morning the two boys, after great exertion, succeeded in scaling the almost inaccessible summit of the low cliff above the cave.

To their surprise and delight they saw a large bark standing toward the island at a distance of about three miles.

The wind was very light and she drew near but slowly.

The boys had brought with them the coil of thin line they fetched from the wreck the day they visited it with Dora.

Their intention was to fasten it around a stout tree that grew on the summit and then let it hang down the side of the cliff the way they had climbed up, so that the next time they made the ascent to the spot, which they regarded as a fine lookout, they would have something to support them.

"A vessel, and she's coming this way!" said Dick, feeling like dancing a hornpipe.

"She's some distance off yet, and might alter her course."

"Then we ought to signal her. We can build a fire up here. That will attract their attention."

"There's not enough stuff up here to make a fire big enough to amount to anything. I'll go down with the help of the rope and tie a big batch to the end of it. Then I'll come back and help you pull it up."

Billy went down to the cave and told Captain Vane and Dora that there was a bark off the island coming that way, and that they were going to signal her from the top of the hill.

Of course the captain and his daughter were delighted to hear that there was a good prospect of their being taken off.

The former helped Billy get a supply of dried material together to be hoisted to the summit.

"As soon as you get the fire going hurry down," said the captain. "Then we'll get the boat out of the creek and we can go out to meet the vessel."

Ten minutes later the beacon fire was lighted.

As soon as it was well under way Billy threw several armsful of green bushes on it, which created a dark smoke that rose like a black column into the almost calm air.

"That will do," he said. "Now we'll go down."

As they were slowly descending with the aid of the rope Dick suddenly exclaimed:

"There's Davy Jones on the rocks below, making his way toward the inlet. He intends to enter the marine cavern that way. As the tide is low he'll be able to do so."

"Well, let him. Who cares? He won't find the kegs of gold when he gets there this time, and he'll find the rear way to the cave cut off, too. By the time he is ready to return the way he went we will probably have left the island for good. He can remain and feast off our stores and the products of the island until some other craft comes this way and takes him off."

As they went down they watched the slow and cautious movements of their enemy on the rocks near the water's edge.

He got along all right till he stepped on some slippery substance, lost his hold and went into the water with a splash.

"Serves him right. He needs a bath," grinned Dick.

The cook came up about three yards from the shore and struck out for the rocks.

He wasn't much of a swimmer, but there was little danger of his being drowned.

There was a Nemesis waiting for him near by that neither the rascal nor the boy watchers counted on.

Jones had hardly gone a yard before something flashed through the water directly for him.

"Good lor!" exclaimed Billy. "A shark! He's lost!"

As the cook of the Susan Scudder reached for the nearest rock and grasped it with his hands, the fish turned over, and, opening its great teeth-ribbed mouth, seized him with a snap.

Jones uttered one terrible scream, then he and the fish vanished under the surface, which was dyed red with his blood.

The boys looked at each other with whitened faces.

"That's the last of him," said Billy. "Now we shall

never know why he poisoned the officers and crew of the bark, as the circumstantial evidence of the case seemed to show that he did."

"I guess he committed the crime for some reason connected with those seven kegs of gold which are now ours."

"I dare say you are right," answered Billy.

When they reached the bottom of the rocks Billy spied Davy Jones's coat lying on the beach where he had discarded it previous to making his fatal trip across the rocky shore.

He examined it, and one of the things he pulled out of a pocket was a letter addressed to Dirk Hatterick.

"This proves that the fellow's name was Dirk Hatterick beyond any doubt," he said.

The same was also sewn on the inner side of the jacket collar.

When the boys rejoined the captain and his daughter, Billy told them of the dreadful end the rascal had come to.

An hour later the four were aboard the bark Starlight, Captain Russell, bound for San Francisco, and the boys took care that the seven small, heavy kegs were taken on board, too.

During the trip, which was a prosperous one, Billy and Dora were constantly in each other's company, and when the vessel arrived at San Francisco they had reached the conclusion that they had been born to make each other happy.

An investigation of the kegs showed that each of them contained \$25,000 in gold American coin, or \$175,000 altogether.

They divided up evenly and quit the sea for good.

Dick bought an interest in a ship chandlery business with a part of his share and had no reason to feel sorry over the investment.

Billy divided his among the savings banks of San Francisco, and the overplus he invested in United States bonds.

Then he started in to acquire a good education, for he was ambitious to make his mark ^{at} the world.

To-day he is a well-known lawyer in the Golden City, and has a handsome residence on Vanness Avenue.

The lady who presides over the household was once Dora Vane, and she has made the former cabin boy a good wife.

They have three growing children, who like nothing better than to hear their papa and "Uncle" Dick talk about the treasure of Skeleton Island.

THE END.

Read "JUST HIS LUCK; OR, CLIMBING THE LADDER OF FAME AND FORTUNE," which will be the next number (142) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

According to Mr. H. D. Curtis, says the "Army and Navy Gazette," the harbor of Valparaiso is now ten feet less in depth than it was before the earthquake of August 16, 1906. The movement seems to have been mainly vertical.

Everywhere in the Old World the wheels of wagons and carriages are two or three times as heavy as those on corresponding vehicles in America, and so appear clumsy and cumbersome to us. The explanation of the difference is that our wheels are made of hickory, a wood which is unknown abroad, and which supplies the requisite strength in smaller mass.

The revolting in Roumania is nothing more than a protest against the land agencies, mostly Jews. The agrarian crisis is, therefore, wrongly interpreted as being a burst of anti-Semitism. The great estates of Roumania include about one-half of the arable soil, and 37 per cent. of the land belongs to 1,560 individuals, out of a population of 6,000,000. The great land owners are, for the most part, absentees, and put their property in charge of agents, to be let out in parcels to the peasants at an exorbitant rent.

"I shall winter in the Sahara," said a traveling man. "With a caravan I shall traverse, under a blinding sun, an endless plain of snow-white sand, but none of my Mohammedan attendants will wear any kind of shade over his eyes. Against that dazzling glare the backs of their necks will be swathed in white linen, and even their ears will be protected. Nothing, though, will keep the sun out of their faces. Wondering about this, I said one day to the *cadi* of an Algerian village: 'Why don't you Arabs wear a cap of some sort? You live in the world's worst sun glare, but neither fez nor turban, under any circumstances, has a peak.' 'The Koran,' the *cadi* answered, 'forbids all true believers to shade their eyes. Obeying the Koran implicitly, we dwellers in the desert avoid like poison brims to our headgear. In consequence, there is more blindness among us than among any other people in the world.'"

A Russian firm which manufactures optical goods turns out thousands of pairs of glasses every year to be worn by cows. "There are a great many cows that wear glasses in my country," said a Russian visitor to New York, in explanation. "I have seen a herd of 40,000 cows with glasses on. It was on the steppes—the great Russian prairies. Our steppes, for six months in the year, are covered with snow, but during a part of the time delicate, fresh grass-tips protrude from that white and dazzling mantle. The cows then are turned out to feed on the new grass, but if their eyes are unprotected the dazzle of sunshine on the snow gives them snow blindness. Thousands of cows suffered horribly, and hundreds died of

snow blindness, until a rude, cheap kind of spectacles, made of leather and smoked glass, was invented and used, with great success."

The stories told by poultry keepers in regard to the laying of eggs are in danger of becoming viewed by the public in the same suspicious light as the tall tales of fishermen. It is announced that an egg laid by a hen belonging to a coast-guard's officer at Bridgeport, England, measured 7 5-8 inches by 6 3-4 inches, while another of similar size, picked up in a farmyard at Fenny Stratford, was, on being opened, found to contain a perfectly formed second egg. The record monster chicken's egg is believed to be one of 8 3-4 inches by 7 inches, and weighing 5 ounces. The most freakish eggs are attributed to ducks. The Weston Park Museum, Sheffield, has a duck's egg which contains another smaller one inside, and a still greater curiosity in a twin egg, the two being joined together end to end. In a museum at Paris a curious four-footed goose lays an egg which is invariably misshapen, and the shell of which is so brittle that it breaks if touched. All efforts to preserve these eggs have been futile. An egg, apparently in a state of perfect preservation, is reported to have been discovered embedded in the mortar of an ancient church near Paris. As the wall had been standing for fully 800 years, the egg must have been undisturbed for all that long period.

JOKES AND JESTS.

Dejected Suitor—If you intended to say "no" why did you let me propose? Sweet Girl—Why, how could I say "no" if you didn't?

Husky Henry—Did you tell de lady I wuz barefooted in all dis snow? Maid—Yes! She says she hasn't any old shoes, but here is a bottle of shoe polish, you poor man!

Yeast—Why does that fellow walk on the railway? The train might come along and kill him. Crimsonbeak—Yes; but I suppose the poor fellow is afraid of the automobiles.

Rufus—Nossuh! Ah don't have no mo' trouble wif de boss at de shop. Uncle Remus—Huh! Yo' mus' 'a' done reformed yo' ways den. Is yo'? Rufus—Nossuh! Ah'se done quit de job.

Mrs. Enpeck—Oh, you needn't talk. You're not quite perfection yourself, I would have you know. Enpeck—No, my dear; but when you're around I'm mighty near perfection. Mrs. Enpeck—Oh, Henry!

"Your daughter," said Mrs. Oldcastle, "has such nerve. She fairly bubbles over with high spirits." "I know it. She gets it from Josiah's side of the house, though. My folks are all strong temperance people."

"Do you think your mother likes me, Mamie?" "I am sure she does." "What makes you sure?" "Because it was only yesterday she asked me when you and I were going to be married, as she wanted to live with us."

Mabel—Yes, dear, I will be a helpmeet to you and try to lighten the daily troubles and worries of your life as best I can. Arthur—But I have none, darling. Mabel—Oh, you old goose! I mean when we are married, of course!

A colored preacher took some candidates for immersion down to a river in Louisiana. Seeing some alligators in the stream, one of them objected. "Why, brother," urged the pastor, "can't you trust the Lord? He took care of Jonah, didn't He?" "Ya-a-s," admitted the ducky, "but a whale's different. A whale's got a mem'ry, but ef one o' dem 'gators wuz ter swaller dis nigger, he'd jes' go ter sleep dar in de sun an' fergit all about me."

THE PLASTER MODEL

By John Sherman.

During the rule of Louis Napoleon I was engaged on the detective force, and by several very lucky operations found myself one of the very best mouchards in Paris; and when Baron Vincent desired one of the most acute men I was detailed for the purpose.

I was very much surprised to be received by the Baroness Vincent instead of the Baron.

That, however, was explained, and in a few moments I was in possession of the facts in the case. Simple enough, and yet, withal, terribly perplexing.

"A magnificent emerald necklace was missing two days ago," the lady informed me, "and some time this morning it was discovered that a priceless diamond set was also stolen."

The Baroness had taken the diamonds in her hand while hunting for the emerald necklace, she declared, since which time she had seen nothing of them.

I made a thorough examination, but found nothing upon which to base a clue.

I could not even satisfy myself as to whether the valuables had been taken by professionals from the outside, or by some one within.

I bowed myself out of the distinguished lady's presence and went home to study the case.

You may imagine my surprise, the very next day, to learn that another and almost equally valuable diamond bracelet had disappeared, and not a clue to assist me.

In the questioning I was obliged to detain the titled dame for the best part of an hour.

We, of course, became wonderfully friendly, that is, considering the difference in our stations in life, and in the course of conversation the Baroness told me her eldest daughter, Mlle. Olga, was soon to be married to Marquis Tardieu, a Mexican gentleman of exceeding wealth, of middle age, very dark complexion, and the blackest of eyes and hair.

When at last I could no longer delay my departure, I rose to leave, and passing into a second salon, I stopped suddenly before a plaster hand, fastened against a mat of purple velvet hung on the wall.

It was such an odd thing that my inquisitiveness was aroused. I exclaimed:

"At the risk of being rude, Baroness Vincent, may I ask is there any special significance in this—is it simply a new feature of the bric-a-brac craze?"

"Yes," she answered, smiling. "I presume it is. It is considered very fashionable for dear friends to exchange a model of this sort instead of pictures. It is quite en regle to have the hand or foot molded."

"Ah!" I answered, smiling in turn. "You people of wealth have many ways of using your money. I presume this is the hand of your husband?"

"Ah! no. 'Tis not the Baron's, but a cast of the Marquis Tardieu's hand, which he presented to his intended bride, Mlle. Olga."

She lifted it from the wall and passed it to me for examination.

In my time I have dabbled in all the ologies, and among them had interested myself in palmistry. Therefore I looked at the mold with considerable care.

I became deeply interested as I turned it over. It was remarkable for the development of the palm on the side of the little finger, and the exceeding length of the thumb.

Desbarolles, the acknowledged authority on palmistry, states that this enlarged development indicates the instincts of an assassin; the length of the thumb, inflexible will; while the line of life encircling the base of the thumb, which was deep and wide, proclaims a thief, and, when joined with the other peculiarities, spoke again of murder.

I had examined the hands of a great many rascals, and had more than ordinary belief in the indications.

I handed it back to the noble dame, with the remark that

it was a very peculiar hand. I am sure she read something of the distrust I felt for the owner of such a palm, for she remarked:

"The Marquis is doubtless a charming gentleman, but I must own that neither I nor my daughter is so enraptured as the Baron. There, now," smiling again, "you will think me exceedingly indiscreet."

The remark was strange, and I could not but wonder at the singular speech of the lady and the rapidity of our intimacy.

I wanted to know more of this Marquis, and found that he frequented a noted gambling house in the Rue de Marat. Therefore I made it my business to visit it frequently.

He never visited the place alone. He was always accompanied by a gray-haired old man named De Lisle.

The salon was kept by a Spanish woman, and was one of the most fashionable in Paris.

One night I found play very hot and furious. A young man opposite the Marquis had been winning largely. Other players crowded around, with the Spanish woman and De Lisle watching the game.

I saw the Marquis draw a card from his sleeve, with which he replaced one in his hand. Luck began to turn, and the young man began to pass over his cash to his unscrupulous antagonist.

This continued until the young fellow placed the whole of his money on the table.

Among other accomplishments I am a ventriloquist. When, therefore, I saw the Marquis about to play a king taken from his sleeve, I cried, in a voice which appeared to proceed from under his feet:

"You are a thief, Marquis Tardieu!"

This charge, breaking the deathly stillness which had prevailed but a moment before, startled the house.

The Marquis, unaware of the real speaker, lost his self-possession, and, pushing back his chair, left two kings of hearts upon the board.

It was plain to all the Marquis was a rascal, and great confusion followed. De Lisle took advantage of the diversion, and dropped double cards into the pocket of the young man.

The Marquis, recovering himself, and aware of De Lisle's operation, insisted that both he and his victim should be searched, when it would be easily proved who was the real swindler.

The cards were found upon the young man. Retreating to a side room, he took a sword-cane and plunged the blade into his bosom.

Staggering back to the card-table, he exclaimed, while the elegant Marquis was coolly thrusting his dishonest gains into his pocket:

"Gentlemen!—think you a rascal dies thus?"

Then, toppling over, he fell to the floor a corpse.

I was so bewildered by the termination of the affair that I could not act at once.

The rash action of the young man ruined my plan. Had he but restrained himself two minutes his honor and his life might have been saved. It was not to my interest to arrest the swindler just then, so I allowed him to leave unmolested.

I was satisfied now that in some way he had managed to steal the precious stones.

I called upon the Baroness the next day, and, by dint of questioning, connected the Marquis with the stolen jewelry, although I did not arouse any suspicion.

He had been so far above suspicion, as the intended husband of Olga Vincent, that it never occurred to me to inquire into his opportunities.

I was not yet prepared to denounce him, for I wished to recover the gems, and contented myself by remarking to my agreeable client:

"I agree with you in distrusting the Marquis. I beg of you to cancel the engagement with your daughter at once, before Paris is ringing with escapades of the Marquis Tardieu."

Before she could question me more closely I withdrew.

The Marquis, I felt convinced, was far too wise to attempt the sale of the stolen gems in Paris.

I did not want to alarm him by searching his baggage, and

besides, I felt tolerably sure the stones would be concealed in some very peculiar way.

It was possible, indeed, that they were placed in some safe deposit company's vault, out of which it would be next to impossible to rescue them, since we had no legal proof of Tardieu's connection with them.

To fasten the crime securely upon him it became necessary to discover the gems on his person.

After the scene in the gambling room the most expert shadows were placed upon the Marquis and his gray-haired accomplice.

Confident that the Marquis would scent danger from the action of Baron Vincent in canceling the marriage contract, and that his next move would be to get the stolen jewels out of France, I instructed the shadows to renewed vigilance, with orders to summon me upon the first sign of a journey, and the word was not long delayed.

"Ah!" I said to myself, as I saw the two take a cab, and observed that De Lisle was evidently about to travel, "so my gray-haired friend, you expect to take those jewels out of Paris? Not if I can prevent it!"

They repaired to the Safe Deposit Company of Paris, and in ten minutes came outside, where they bade each other goodbye.

I observed De Lisle was very careful with a leather traveling bag.

Leaving one of my men to keep De Lisle in view, I searched several stores until I obtained the exact counterpart of the article. I reached the station in time to board the train, and by feeling the guard got into the same carriage with De Lisle.

In due time I obtained his satchel, and left mine. I had the jewels, but when he opened my satchel he would find my card, to be handed, with my compliments, to Marquis Tardieu.

We may imagine his astonishment on discovering the trick by which he had lost his valuable plunder.

THE BOATSWAIN'S YARN

It's nigh on to six years ago when I was quartermaster in a steamer—the Zebra—lying at her wharf in Calcutta, and loading up for Glasgow. The Hooghly was crowded with sailing vessels that couldn't get no crews, and most of their own men had deserted, and shipped in steamers that were going through the Suez Canal, that had just been opened. They all wanted to get home quick, you see, and to go by the new-fangled route, and not to make a four months' run around the Cape.

The pilot had gone over the side, the watch had been set, and the steamer was driven down the Bay of Bengal, and getting well out toward the Indian Ocean, when there was a row for'ard, and the boatswain came aft to where the skipper was standing on the poop. He was dragging a youngster, about sixteen years old, by the collar of the jacket along with him.

"I hooked him out of the fore hatch, your honor," he says. "I heard him scratching around, and I raised the hatchway, and there he was."

"I was trying to get out, sir," said the lad, very bold and polite. "I'm a sailor, and willing to work. I don't want any pay, but if you'll let me work my passage you won't be sorry."

Our skipper muttered to himself, and turning to me he said: "Quartermaster, put the young imp in irons for to-night. I'll see what it's best to do with him in the morning."

I was sorry for the poor lad, but I had to obey orders, and the irons were soon on his wrists and ankles, in the fore-castle. He was terribly upset, and when I was on watch that night I went to him and tried to cheer him up. It was getting on to four bells when the mate said he'd like to see the boy, and he went with me into the fore-castle.

"Now, my lad," he says, stooping over him with a lantern, "tell us all about it. What did you stow away for? Why didn't you ship in a sailing vessel if you wanted to get home to see your mother?"

"Oh, sir," says the youngster, with tears in his eyes, as he

sat up alongside of the post that he was tied to, "I should have been too late, and she'd have been in the poorhouse. You see, I ran away from home two years ago, and went to sea, because I was the oldest of three, and she wasn't able to feed us all. I've sent her a little money since then, and I've had letters from her, but I've never seen her. I have saved fifteen pounds, and I wanted to give it to her with my own hands. I wish now I had sent it to her; but maybe I can post it to her, if he takes me on to Glasgow."

"Hold up your head, my lad," says the mate, "and I'll say a word or two for you to the skipper."

He went out of the fore-castle, and I followed him close enough to hear the boy's story told again.

The skipper thought about it for a few seconds, then he spoke, and we both knew by the tones of his voice that one of his hardest fits was on him.

"I don't see," he said, "what I have to do with all this. I don't want any more hands, and I won't have any more. But we can stand another passenger. You say the youngster has fifteen pounds. Go and get the money from him."

But the mate's face showed plainly enough that the irons should go on him first. The skipper saw it, and calling to me, he told me to uniron the lad and bring him out of the fore-castle.

When he was on the main deck the skipper says to him:

"Youngster, the mate tells me that you have fifteen pounds about you."

"Yes, sir," says the boy.

"Hand it over," says the skipper, shortly.

The boy turned white, but he pulled a little canvas bag from his bosom and gave it to the skipper, who counted fifteen ten-rupee notes out of it.

"Now this," he says, "won't pay half your passage, but you can go aft and the steward will give you a berth."

It was an awful night that saw us off the shore of London-derry; a dead lee shore it was then, and the steamer, with a broken shaft, drifting hard on to it. We could hear the waves breaking near us, and we had passed the light that we should have been making for, without noticing it.

"Mr. Reynolds," said the skipper to the mate, as they stood together on the bridge, "we'll be on the beach in half an hour."

"Seems so, sir," said the mate stiffly. He had not liked the skipper since the boy's money was taken from him when they were in the Bay of Bengal.

The water was far too deep to let go an anchor, even if one could have held, which it could not in that gale. Enough head sail had been set to keep the steamer from broaching to, but all hands saw, as things were going, that she would soon be on the rocks.

Suddenly the skipper started as some one touched him on the shoulder. The youngster was standing beside him.

"I was born on that coast, sir," he said, speaking very slow, "and I know every rock on it. I know, besides, a channel on the port bow. We'll be soon off it. Will you allow me to take you in?"

"If you think you can," said the skipper. "It don't make much difference," he says, turning to the mate, "for we're bound to go ashore anyhow."

The youngster took the wheel and headed her, it seemed to all of us, for where the breakers sounded loudest. It was a ticklish time for all hands. But all at once the rocks seemed to open in front, and the steamer ran through a passage not fifty yards across, and in five minutes we were safely at anchor in smooth water.

The next morning the skipper says to his passenger:

"Here's fifteen pounds that I owe you, and the company will cash this for you, sir, for saving their ship."

And he gave the youngster an order for one hundred pounds.

There was nothing proud about the lad. He took the money, paid the mother's rent, and gave her a snug sum for house-keeping. What became of him? Well, he and I have been shipmates pretty nigh ever since, though he's heaved many a knot ahead of me. That's him calling me now, concluded the boatswain, pressing the fire out of his pipe with his thumb, and going out on the deck, where the captain wanted him to muster the men to Sunday service.

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